

ROBERT BUCHANAN



HARRIETT JAY



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ROBERT BUCHANAN

SOME ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE
HIS LIFE'S WORK AND HIS
LITERARY FRIENDSHIPS ❖ ❖

BY

HARRIETT JAY

AUTHOR OF "THE QUEEN OF CONNAUGHT," "THE DARK COLLEEN,"
"MADGE DUNRAVEN," ETC., ETC.



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INSCRIPTION

To the memory of Robert Buchanan, who adopted me in my childhood, and who, throughout his life, was to me the kindest of fathers, the best of friends. To him I owe all that I have and am; and now that he is gone, it is my proud pleasure to remember that, during his last bitter hours of pain, I was able to return to him, even if ever so slightly, a little of the great tenderness and devotion which he had always given to me.

HARRIETT JAY.

It was not until some years later that I found myself free to face with
the kind of the past. Permitted to share my thoughts and feelings, this close to the
year, and of whom, since he still lives, I ~~must~~ ^{must} speak more guardedly, though not-
less earnestly. At the first glance again, he was utterly unlike the others, yet-
the intent that I met I recalled ~~over and over~~ that the Philosopher, as well
as the Romanist & the Democrat, was ~~an~~ ^a ~~unlike~~ ^{shared within him} ~~of~~ ^{of} Fairy Land. For many a
long day I had drawn knowledge & inspiration from his inspired pages, & once
in three we had responded; and now it fell about lecture were near neighbors,
I dwelling at Hampstead, he at Avenue Road, Regent's Park. Little did I fancy,
as I asked him once for the first time, that I should find the Elves of

SPECIMEN OF ROBERT BUCHANAN'S HANDWRITING.

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PREFACE

“**N**OBODY could tell the story of his life so well as Robert Buchanan himself” (wrote Mr. T. P. O'Connor in M.A.P.), and I feel this statement to be so absolutely true that I have endeavoured in compiling these Memoirs, to allow the Poet as far as possible to speak for himself. With this object in view I have been most careful to gather together every scrap of reminiscence which he has published from time to time in various newspapers and magazines. He knew himself better than any man or woman could possibly know him, no matter how intimate their acquaintance with him might be, and so I have endeavoured to allow him to reveal himself to the world.

I suppose no one knew him better than I did, and yet even I was debarred from the knowledge of some of his most sacred thoughts and feelings until after he had been laid to rest. A careful study of his diaries, and some of the private papers which he left behind him revealed to me certain phases of his character of which I had had no previous knowledge whatever.

The task, though an arduous one, has been to me a labour of love, and if, after a perusal of this volume the heart of the reader is touched by the struggles of a man who fought so bravely for the good of Humanity, I shall have reaped my reward.

I wish to tender my best thanks to my brother and sister artists who have so generously assisted me in my work. To Mr. G. R. Sims, Mr. R. E. Francillon, Mr. Henry S. Salt, and Mr. Henry Murray, I am specially indebted for certain pages of reminiscence which have been written for this work, and which I feel sure will be of exceptional interest to the public.

I have also to acknowledge the courtesy of Mr. Walter Scott for permission to quote from a Preface written by Mr. Buchanan to the Poems (Canterbury Edition) of the Hon. Roden Noel; of Mr. T. P. O'Connor for permission to quote from "M.A.P."; of Mr. Philip Welby for permission to quote from an article on Mr. Buchanan, written by Mr. Henry Murray and issued by Mr. Welby in book form, under the title, "Robert Buchanan and other Essays"; to Mr. William Freeland for permission to quote from the *Glasgow Evening Times*. I am also indebted to the Right Hon. W. E. H. Lecky, M.P., to Mr. Herbert Spencer, Mr. Leslie Stephen, Mr. William Canton, Mr. Alexander Strahan, Mr. Lionel Gowing, Mrs. Macanally, Dr. Harry Campbell, Dr. Gorham, Dr. Stodart Walker, and the Rev. T. Varney and Miss Wylie for permission to quote from letters, and I wish also to publicly acknowledge my indebtedness to my dear friend, Miss Edith Francillon, whose advice and help during the progress of this work have been of the utmost value to me. Though her name does not appear in the following pages, she was a constant visitor at our house, and was intimately

acquainted with and much esteemed by both the Poet and his wife.

My own association with Mr. Buchanan has been of so exceptional a character, that a word or so concerning the position which I held in his household may not be out of place here. In the eye of the law I was his sister-in-law, but that relationship could not possibly convey any idea of the tie which bound us together. Briefly told, the story is as follows: When my sister had been married some three or four years, and was still childless, she resolved to adopt me. In doing this she was anxious that any love which I might have to give should be given to herself and to her husband, so I was taken from my home at a very tender age and for many years was never allowed to revisit it. When at length I was permitted to see my mother I remember looking at her very much as little Paul Dombey looked at Miss Pipchin, wondering all the time whether she could possibly *be* my mother, or whether she was some "strange person" whom I was told to regard in that light. I turned away with a great sob and threw myself into my sister's arms, clinging to her as the only mother whom I was thenceforth to know. As to the Poet, I was always taught both by his wife and his mother, to look up to him as a model of all the virtues, and my line of conduct was invariably determined by his approval or the reverse. If I proffered some childish request it was always met with, "Yes, if Robert says you may," or "No, I don't think Robert would like that," and though I was sometimes wayward and wilful as children too often are, I never wavered, I trust, in that great love which it was my duty as well as my pleasure to give. His frown always made me wretched, his smile made me glad, and I was never so

happy as when I had earned his praise. When my sister died, it was her dying wish that I should remain with him, when his mother died the request was again whispered into my ear by lips which were fast growing cold. During his last sad, terrible illness my friends wrote to me praising me for what they called my "generosity and self-sacrifice," when indeed there was neither generosity nor self-sacrifice to praise. The greatest pleasure in life, it seems to me, is to be able to minister to the wants of those we love, and I did what I did because in the doing of it lay my only chance of happiness. When at length my task was ended I felt only as if all the happiness had been taken out of my life, but for his sake I rejoiced that his pains were ended, and that he had gone to rejoin those whom he had so passionately loved.

HARRIETT JAY.

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA.

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CHAPTER I

HIIS BIRTH

ROBERT BUCHANAN, poet, novelist, dramatist, was born at Caverswall in Lancashire on the 18th of August, 1841.

An unworldly man, whose life was chiefly occupied with the child's puzzle of natural religion. A worker, yet a dreamer who fought Don Quixote-like with many windmills; a lover of truth and beauty, yet darkly doomed to much ignoble pot-boiling, a dweller between the fringe of literary Bohemia and the beginning of mere cloudland, who, while giving a careless glance at the present generation, ever fixed a long, hopeful, wistful look towards posterity.

The story of his life which to the best of my ability I am about to set down, is in many respects a sad one. He had few friends and many enemies, and he received from the world many cruel blows. From the beginning I fear he lacked the true literary temper, but he always tried to preach the truth as he saw it, never counting the cost to himself. A fearless, upright, honest man, whose life, if rightly studied, cannot fail to be of interest to the world.

It was perhaps because he heard the name of God for the first time so late in boyhood that the mention

of that name never grew tiresome to him. He was born in the strangest odour of infidelity, hence infidelity amused him less than most men, but for infidels and revolvers he had ever a kindly feeling quite irrespective of their creed or his. His life was a lonely one—he was from first to last a lonely man ; not unsociable by disposition, not unsympathetic, but seldom travelling far for sympathy—always climbing, climbing, but never quite reaching the heights on which he had set his intellectual ideals. Had his father not broken down in health and fortune all might have been very different with him ; he would at least have had a foothold apart from the dangerous quicksands of literature. For many years he suffered a martyrdom from ill health, from the infinite delicacies of an over-wrought nervous system, thence came isolation, friendlessness, bitterness, misconception, and despair.

Perhaps no man has been oftener abused, yet no man needed kindness so much and received so little. He was stabbed again and again, and scarcely one arm was ever stretched out in his defence ; yet he bore his burthen with cheerfulness and infinite hope, and now, in reviewing his life, I can truly say that it was honest even in its utmost blindness ; unselfish in its one lingering aspiration to be truthful, and not to fear the truth. He was never an ambitious man ; he reaped what he sowed, and it was a blessed harvest ; for, in spite of many trials and temptations, he never lost the deep poetic heart which he brought with him into the world as his only birthright.

As far back as the year 1891, when giving some account of his early experiences, he wrote :—

“At the time when the benign Don Quixote of modern Socialism, Robert Owen, was issuing his

propaganda of a New Moral World, and when his words of promise sounded like a trumpet-note to so many youthful sons of toil, one of the first to respond was a poor journeyman tailor in Ayrshire, who, throwing down goose and scissors, straightway aspired to the *rôle* of Socialist reformer; was soon welcomed and appreciated for his keen Scottish intelligence, his wide, if uninstructed reading, and his rugged eloquence on the platform; in due time became one of Owen's most valued Missionaries; and before many years had elapsed was famous among his own people, and infamous among the orthodox, as Robert Buchanan, poet and iconoclast. That man was my father.

"Sometimes stumping the country as a controversialist on the side of Free-Thought, sometimes travelling from town to town with a magic lantern (one of his great feats being the exposure of the popular theory of 'ghosts,' through the production of a mystic Skeleton which he sent dancing among his affrighted audience), sometimes following his gentle Leader into perilous places where the new gospel was hateful or unknown, he laboured pertinaciously in the good cause till, in or about 1840, well known to Socialists as the Communistic Year, he married Miss Margaret Williams, daughter of a well-known solicitor (of Socialistic leanings) in Stoke-upon-Trent. Robert Owen himself honoured the civil ceremony before the Registrar, and gave Miss Williams away. About a year afterwards I was born—if not in the odour of sanctity, at least in the full and increasing daylight of the New Moral World.

"It was, as the reader is doubtless aware, a stirring time. The wave of the great Revolution had not yet spent itself, and every day some doomed structure

was subsiding into the waste of troubled waters. Many failures had not yet daunted the apostles of Liberty and Co-operation. Instead of the stagnant pessimism which now covers the green fields of Democracy with loathsome pools, an ardent optimism was everywhere at work. Owen's clear call to arms had been heard all over the land, bringing recruits from the tailor's shop, the smithy, the cobbler's bench, the manufactory, the plough-tail, from every place indeed, where the poor sons of toil had learned to read and think. Many of these men, my father among the number, had splendid gifts; all had the courage of their opinions.

"Those who had the happiness to know Robert Owen knew him as the most benign of men, in whom the enthusiasm of humanity was combined with the most extraordinary powers of practical business. In the words of Duke Bernard of Saxe-Weimar, 'Mr. Owen looked for nothing less than to renovate the world, to extirpate all evil, to banish all punishment, to create like views and like wants, and to guard against all conflicts and all hostilities.' His benevolence, however, was entirely scientific—he was, in fact, the father and founder of modern social science. His success, for a time at least, was phenomenal. In a letter to the *Times* newspaper in 1834 he said, addressing his friend Lord Brougham: 'I believe it is known to your lordship that from every point of view no experiment was ever so successful as the one I conducted at New Lanark, although it was commenced and continued in opposition to all the oldest and strongest prejudices of mankind. For twenty-nine years we did without the necessity for magistrates or lawyers; without a single legal punishment; without any known poor's-rate, without intemperance or re-

ligious animosities. We reduced the hours of labour, well educated all the children from infancy, greatly improved the condition of the adults, diminished their daily hours of labour, paid interest on capital, and cleared upwards of £300,000 of profit !' So far his mission had been practical, and had succeeded ; but in 1837 he delivered a formula which made him thenceforth the avowed enemy of all who held orthodox opinions.

" 'ALL THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD,' he said, 'ARE WRONG !' From that time forth the influential classes entirely deserted him. He became at once an apostle and a martyr. Personally a Theist, he preached universal toleration, a form of toleration which is, and always has been, to nine-tenths of mankind, quite intolerable.

"Only those who have carefully followed the history of the Socialistic movement under Owen can have any notion whatever of the condition of England in those troublous times. A freethinker, a proclaimer of the right to private judgment, often carried his life in his hand. The priest and the capitalist, the bigot and the landowner, worked everywhere against the new doctrines, which, they contended, were poisoning the air—the missionaries of Socialism were very generally regarded as agents of the Prince of Darkness conspiring to plunge the country into anarchy and revolution. Owen's views on religion were generally considered blasphemous, horrible, atheistical, but it was his ideas on marriage, in the moral programme which he advanced with persuasive eloquence, that aroused the most frenzied opposition, particularly among the women of the lower classes, who were firmly persuaded that the object was to rob them of their husbands and by

reducing all sexual union to a simple contract, revokable at pleasure, to leave them at the mercy of male caprice and to bastardise their children. This delusion drove the wives and mothers of the toiling classes to absolute frenzy, and made them the chief leaders and abettors of the many acts of violence to which Owen's missionaries were subjected."¹

The poet's grandfather, known throughout the Midlands as "Lawyer Williams," was a very remarkable man. Quite early in his career he had come under the influence of Robert Owen and had accepted that philanthropist's ideas on social, political, and religious problems—in fact, he was a freethinker of the most advanced school. He fearlessly proclaimed his opinions in and out of season, and this exceptional candour, so far from hindering his progress in his profession, gained for him the respect of his most bitter opponents. It was a favourite dictum of his, that there was no such anachronism as an "honest lawyer," but he himself was honesty incarnate, a living refutation of his own dictum; and his fearlessness, his unselfishness in helping the weak and in denouncing every form of injustice, earned for him the title of the "poor man's friend."

At the time that the war against Capital and Superstition was raging, "Lawyer Williams" followed his profession as a solicitor in Stoke-upon-Trent, and his house became the temporary home of every wandering preacher of the cause who visited the district. He entertained the lecturers, he presided at their meetings, he furthered, both publicly and privately, the dissemination of the new doctrines, and only his great popularity with the lower classes saved him from personal violence. Again and again when the

¹ "Latter Day Leaves."

mob rose in its fury, when public halls were wrecked and Owen's lecturers were compelled to fly for their lives, the only refuge in Stoke was the house of "Lawyer Williams," and while some trembling apostle of freethought was being smuggled away through the back door, the "poor man's friend" faced the furies and diverted their attention to his own person. Any other man's house would have been burned down or razed to the ground ; any other man would, in all likelihood, have been torn to pieces. Both the men and women of Stoke respected the man who had befriended them in a thousand ways, who had sacrificed time and money and reputation to the legal defence of the poorest and most wretched among them, and much as they loathed the opinions which he fearlessly shared, not one hand in all the crowd was raised against him. Nor was it among the poor and wretched alone that his name was a synonym for honesty, kindness, and philanthropy. Even amongst the clergy, his bitterest opponents, he had sympathisers and well-wishers. Doctor Vale, the Vicar of Stoke, was the intimate friend of the lawyer and his wife, and on one occasion Mr. Williams protected *him* from the wild mob of hungry men and women who would otherwise have had his life.

To the lawyer and his wife were born two children, a son and a daughter, the latter of whom became the poet's mother. She was a very beautiful girl—blue-eyed and golden-haired. Almost with her first breath she inhaled the atmosphere of Socialism and freethought. Throughout her long life she had two supreme objects of idolatry—her father, who reciprocated her passionate attachment, and Robert Owen, whom she had been taught to regard as the wisest and best of men.

To the house of "Lawyer Williams" came from time to time all the preachers of the cause. Among these men was the poet's father, who, when quite a boy, had run away from home to seek his fortune. He was a dark, somewhat reserved young man, an omnivorous reader, and a fairly fluent speaker, but it was in the height of fiery argument on the public platform that he appeared at his best. Some of his fellow missionaries excelled him in oratorical gifts, but in knowledge of the subjects discussed, and in range of general information he had no equal among them. His manners were far from courtly, but his strong intellectual qualities attracted Miss Williams, and before they had been very long acquainted they were engaged to be married. The marriage took place in the autumn of 1840, and on the 18th day of August, 1841, Robert, their only son, was born. About twelve years later Mrs. Buchanan gave birth to a little girl, who died in infancy, so Robert was practically their only child.

The fact that his parents had no other surviving children was, I think, the chief misfortune of his life, as well as its crowning blessing. An only child, he became the idol of his mother, whose affection for him he returned with absolutely overmastering intensity. His feeling towards his father, he often said, was one of ordinary, though strong affection, but towards his mother it was far from ordinary. His earliest memories were of her beauty and quite girlish grace. She was a particularly young-looking woman at all times, and he could never, at any hour of his life, realise the fact that she was growing old. In looking at her even when she was close upon eighty years of age, he saw only the soft blue eyes and golden hair as he had seen them long ago, and I



ROBERT BUCHANAN.
(The Poet's Father.)

have heard him remark again and again that it always gave him a shock if any one happened to refer to her as "old." "I cannot imagine my mother old," he would say, and again, the very day after she died, "I do not feel that she is dead, for I cannot imagine the world without my mother!" As I have said, he adored her, and was in turn adored. Thus reared and sheltered from every harsh influence, he grew sensitive beyond measure, and his naturally nervous temperament became so highly strung, that he was ill prepared for the struggles of the world. This was a misfortune, and the cause later on of infinite pain and heartache. He was spoiled by too much tenderness and solicitude, weakened by too many gusts of childish passion which wrung his heart the more because he was not openly demonstrative, but given on the contrary to the concealment of his deepest feelings. But the influence of his mother was not merely emotional. He learned from her teaching to be sympathetic and tender-hearted, to worship goodness and to rise in revolt against any form of injustice or oppression. The words of the great Humanitarians were on her lips, she had learned them at her father's knee, and he learned them in turn at hers.

From his parents he had no religious training whatever, yet slowly and imperceptibly there grew in him a deep and abiding sense of natural religion, of awe and reverence for the mysterious Power which moves the world. He could never remember when he first began to say his prayers, but he knew that as a child he said them, and later on to my knowledge on two memorable occasions he said them—first, by the dead body of his wife, next by the dead body of his mother, she who to him was the symbol of all that was beautiful and loving in humanity.

CHAPTER II

EARLY MEMORIES, 1841-50

“THE reward of Socialist missionaries in those days was, I fear, quite inadequate to their personal necessities, and my father was one of many who found it necessary to eke out a subsistence by reporting for the Press. Just after I was born he joined the staff of the *Sun* newspaper, combining with his occupation of reporter that of small news-vendor. A few months later, when I was still an infant, my mother went to join the community at Ham Common, in Surrey, the manager of which was Mr. William Oldham, whose chief eccentricity was a preference for wet sheets to dry ones. The inmates of Alcott House, or, as it was called, the Concordian, were vegetarians, objected to the use of even salt and tea, and, naturally, to all stimulants, and advocated entire abstinence from indulgences of the flesh, including marriage. My mother, as a married woman, was refused admission to the inner, or perfectly sacred, circle, which was presided over by Oldham, the grand “Pater.” A diet consisting almost entirely of uncooked cabbage is apt to grow monotonous, and my mother did not remain at Ham Common long. A year or two later, however, when New Harmony was established, she went on Robert Owen’s special

invitation to Queenwood, near Wisbech, Norfolk, a baronial structure surrounded by spacious woods and promenades. The inmates of Queenwood, though they were all believers in the principle of association, consulted their own taste in matters of diet, but the most popular table in the Hall was the one where a vegetarian diet alone was served. It was, as I gathered, a happy and innocent community; but infamous reports were spread concerning it by the antagonists of human progress; it was, in fact, described as an immoral association. Members of the Church Orthodox were not likely to forgive a community founded to illustrate the doctrines of the man who denounced all religions as 'wrong,' and who on the platform and in the newspapers had so often shown the weak points in the armour of Christianity. 'Is it possible' asked an opponent of Socialism at Edinburgh, in 1838, 'to train an individual to believe that two and two make five?' 'We need not, I fancy, go far for an answer,' replied Owen, with his gentle smile and inimitable courtliness of manner, 'I fancy all of us know many persons who are trained to believe that *three make one*, and who think very ill of you if you differ from them.'

"I have often heard my mother speak of Robert Owen as the kindest and most gracious of men, with an air of indomitable gentleness peculiarly irritating to individuals whose *métier* it was to discuss burning questions under burning excitement. I saw the good man often early in my life, but my recollection of him is kaleidoscopic—one tiny sparkle of memory mixed confusedly with things I have only heard. In our home, wherever it might be, he was a sort of religious presence. I heard his name long before I heard that of Jesus Christ. I was taught to

think of him as of one wholly unselfish, holy, and morally omniscient. I heard again and again of his gracious deeds and inspiring words. One secret of his extraordinary power was that he was pre-eminently a 'gentleman.' Under his refining influence the rough, untutored men who flocked to his standard became gentle too. When persecution came they took it like their master, patiently and wisely. To know Robert Owen was in itself a liberal education.

"My first vivid recollections are of the period when my father, having established himself on the London Press, and residing permanently in London, sent me to a small school at Hampton Wick, kept by a well-known Socialist missionary, Alexander Campbell, known to his circle as the 'Patriarch.' He was a grave, simple man, with peculiar notions on the Immanence of the Deity, or what is called Being. With his peculiar religious ideas he combined, I fancy, eccentric views concerning the diet of the human race. At all events, the children under the care of himself and his daughter pined for lack of fitting nutriment. I myself, as a very little boy, must have been in danger of starvation, for I vividly remember having to supplement the school diet, which was chiefly vegetarian, by eating snails gathered in the garden. On going home for the holidays I was found to be a little skeleton, and my mother took care that I did not return to the establishment.

"I was next sent to a so-called French and German College at Merton, kept by a certain M. de Chastelain, a French gentleman and, I think, a *refugee*. It was a large school, excellently conducted, but resembling, in some respects, Mr. Creakle's establishment, made famous by the author of "David Copperfield." Just opposite the main entrance was a CHURCH,

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almost the first I had ever seen, and certainly the first I ever entered. Here, I presume, I became acquainted with the national religion and its sacred terminology. I vividly recall the sense of strangeness I experienced when I listened, little heathen that I was, to the ordinary vocabulary of Christianity. I had received no religious teaching: if I had heard the name of God, it had been as a voice from far away; and I was old enough to understand that much that was taught in churches was mostly 'superstition.' But not till some years afterwards, when I was taken to Scotland, did I completely realise the gloom and narrowness of the popular Christian creed.

"My parents were now residing at Norwood, in a quaint little cottage commanding a distant prospect of St. Paul's; and thither, chiefly on Sundays, came many of the apostles of progress—hirsute men for the most part, of all characters and of all nations. When my holidays occurred I saw a good deal of these gentlemen. Two of them I remember vividly, who generally came together: one a little miniature of a man with tiny feet and hands and an enormous head, generally covered by a chimney-pot hat three or four sizes too large for it; the other a mighty fellow, of gigantic stature, with a chest fit for Hercules and a voice like a trumpet. The first was Louis Blanc, a famous exile: the second was Caussidière, who had been chief of the police in Paris during the last Revolution. Both spoke English fairly, and Blanc wrote it like an Englishman. It was during a visit of this strange pair that I first heard the 'Marseillaise.' Sung by Caussidière in stentorian tones, with kindling eyes and excited gestures, it sounded like a wild conjuration. I listened to these men for hours, as they talked of their country and its sorrows, and named

the wondrous words, 'Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.'

"In after years I met Louis Blanc again, and by that time only the faintest trace of a foreign accent remained to show that he was a Frenchman. He was at once the keenest and most enthusiastic of little men, neat in his person, brilliant in his talk, and cultured to the finger-nails. He loved England, which had so long afforded him a home, and hated nothing in the world but one thing, the Empire, and one man, the Emperor. He preached the great Socialistic doctrine of *solidarity*, in writings which were as brilliant as they were closely reasoned; he was an enemy of tyranny in any form; and he lived long enough to see the foulest tyranny of modern times, a tyranny of the senses, ignominiously overthrown at Sedan.

"Another friend of my father, and a constant visitor at our house, was Lloyd Jones, lecturer, debater, and journalist. An Irishman with the mellowest of voices, he delighted my young soul with snatches of jovial song, 'The Widow Machree,' 'The Leather Bottél,' and the modern burlesque of that royal ballad, 'The Pewter Quart,' written, I think, by Macguire, and originally published in Blackwood—

'Here, boy, take this handful of brass,
Across to the *Goose and the Gridiron* pass,
Pay the coin on the counter out,
And bring me a pint of foaming stout,
Put it not into bottle or jug,
Cannikin, rumkin, flagon, or mug,
Into nothing at all, in short,
Except the natural Pewter Quart!'

"Jones 'troll'd' rather than sang, with robust strength and humour. I found out when I was a

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year or two older, that he knew and loved the obscurer early poets, and could recite whole passages from their works by heart. George Wither was a great favourite of his, and he had a fine collection of that poet's works, many of them very scarce. It was a great treat to hear him sing Wither's charming ballad—

‘ Shall I, wasting in despair,
Die because a woman's fair ?
If she be not fair to *me*,
What care I how fair she be ?’

or to hear him recite the same poet's naïve, yet lively invocation to the Muse, written in prison—

‘ By a Daisy whose leaves spread,
Shut when Titan goes to bed,
By a lush upon a tree,
She could more infuse in me
Than all Nature's wonders can
In some other wiser man !’

I owe Lloyd Jones this debt, that he first taught me to love old songs and homespun English poetry. He was a large-hearted, genial man, not to be forgotten in any chronicle of the Socialistic cause.

“ It was not, as I have hinted, until I was taken by my parents to reside in Scotland that I came face to face with the Dismal Superstition against which my father and these men, his friends, were passionately struggling. I then learned for the first time that to fight for human good, to be honest and fearless, to love the Light, was to be branded as an Enemy of Society and an Atheist. I saw my father so branded, and I have not forgotten my first horror when children of my own age avoided me, on the score that I was the son of an ‘infidel.’ But I learned now that

there was more real religion, more holy zeal for Humanity, in these revolvers against the popular creed than in most of the Christians who preach one faith and practise another.

"Tantum Religio potuit suadere malorum."

"The world has advanced somewhat since those early days of which I have been writing. There is no sign as yet, however, that the warning uttered long ago by Lucretius, and echoed by the minority from generation to generation, has been of much avail."¹

¹ "Latter Day Leaves."

CHAPTER III

BOYHOOD, 1850-56

THE poet was about ten years of age when he left the French and German College at Merton, and accompanied his parents to Glasgow, where his father had undertaken to edit a newspaper of advanced liberal views, the *Glasgow Sentinel*. It was in Glasgow, therefore, that he spent a large portion of his boyhood and early youth. The newspaper office was up a dingy street in the neighbourhood of the Trongate, and all around stretched the darkest slums and dens of the city. Just below it was the newspaper shop of William Love, who had some sort of share in the proprietorship of the *Sentinel*.

William Love was a cripple, with one leg much smaller than the other. He had been the mainstay of a large family of brothers and sisters, and was destined in after years to become the largest bookseller in Glasgow. At the time of which I write he was in a very small way of business indeed, but what his occupation lacked in one way was amply made up for in another. On that dingy counter lay the whole armoury of the new moral world, tracts for the times, Owen's speeches, Holyoake's debates, all the

literature of Socialism. There, from time to time, gathered the local apostles of freethinking—Lloyd Jones, Alexander Campbell, William Turvey, and Mr. Buchanan, sen. Thus, as a boy, Robert Buchanan listened to the oracles and drank in the atmosphere of unbelief.

To understand the boy's position at that period of his life it is necessary to remember that Glasgow was at that time the very stronghold of Godliness and more particularly of Sabbatarianism. The men of whom I am writing were looked upon as social outcasts. When they appeared upon the platform to face the champions of orthodoxy, it was often at the peril of their lives. Even when walking in the streets they were frequently assailed with insulting epithets, and threatened with personal violence. The poet's father was an object of special detestation, and he himself, as the son of a notorious unbeliever, was very often taught the lesson of social persecution. If he made an acquaintance of his own age, that boy was generally warned against him and taught to give him the cold shoulder. "Don't play with yon laddie," the boys themselves would say, "his father's an infidel!" Ridiculous as the record of this persecution may appear, it caused the lad at the time a great deal of misery, and later on, when we spoke together of those days of his youth, he assured me that many a time he had prayed with all his soul that his father would mend his ways, go to church, and accept the social sanctities like other men!

Meantime the boy was sent to a small day school in the suburb of Glasgow where the family had taken up their abode. It seems to have been a poor establishment compared to the college at Merton, but he learned in it the rudiments of Latin and mathematics,

and throve under the strict yet kindly care of the master, one of those zealous pedagogues to be found only in Scotland. But his real education went on in his father's house, and at the house of William Love, where his father went every Sunday to read the secular journals of the week.

In his very able article, written during the poet's last illness, and published shortly before his death, Mr. Henry Murray says: "From a brief period of God-intoxication, through many doubts and battles and fluctuations, he came at last to face the facts of Life and Death, with only the thinnest veil of mysticism to hide their stern nakedness. Thin as that veil was, it was growing ever thinner. From the broken arc we may divine the perfect round, and it is my fixed belief that, had the subtle and cruel malady which struck him down but spared him for a little longer time, he would logically have completed the evolution of so many years, and have definitely proclaimed himself as an Agnostic, perhaps even as an atheist."¹

An agnostic he undoubtedly was, but it seems to me that a man of his emotional temperament could never have become an atheist.

"For the life of me I cannot tell how the sweet spirit of natural piety arose within me. All my experience, my birth, my education, my entire surroundings were against its birth or growth, all the human beings I had known or listened to were confirmed sceptics or boisterous unbelievers. Yet while my father was confidently preaching God's non-existence, I was praying to God in the language of the canonical books. I cannot even remember a time when I did not kneel by my bedside before going to

¹ "Robert Buchanan and other Essays."

sleep, and repeat the Lord's Prayer. So far away was I from any human sympathy in this foolish matter, that this praying of mine was ever done secretly, with a strong sense of shame and dread of discovery." ¹

As late as the year 1896, he wrote :—

“‘The dumb, wistful yearning in man to something higher—yearning such as the animal creation showed in the Greek period to the human—has not yet found any interpreter equal to Buchanan.’ These words, written by a writer in the *Spectator* in the course of a general estimate of modern poets, are the highest tribute I have ever received from any contemporary critic, and because I think they are true, in so far as they recognise what I have at least attempted to do in poetry, I am proud to quote them. I am ready to admit *au rest*, that my religion is *only* a yearning, my hope only a hope, born even out of a certain kind of despair ; but through all the aberrations of a stormy personal career, and amid all the vicissitudes of fame and fortune, I have never ceased to cherish it, and the day it dies within me will be the day of my intellectual and moral extinction. It includes, I need not say, the forlorn and perhaps foolish faith of my childhood—the faith (to be carefully distinguished from belief) in personal immortality, in a supreme God or Good, and in the Life after Death. A faith very much out of fashion. To many good and wise men, to many more men who are neither good nor wise, such a faith is merely a survival from the lower forms of intelligence, and will become less and less possible as human beings realise the actual conditions of existence and energise more and more unselfishly for the good of the great and perfect being, Humanity.

¹ “Latter Day Leaves.”

But to me, a dreamer of dreams, the 'dumb, wistful yearning' is born solely and wholly, not out of love for the race, but out of acute, intimate, possibly selfish *personal* love ; my religion, like my charity, begins at home, and my philanthropy is only the generalisation of individual experience and affection. It is this fact which has made me, after thirty years of thought on religious subjects, see in the Christian religion, as still preached and taught, the hereditary enemy of human aspiration. Christianity is not dead ; it will never die so long as the deductive method, arguing from generalisations to particulars, possess any fascination for the human mind, in preference to the method which instructs religion on the basis of particular and individual proofs and discovers in it the only possible solution of an eternal enigma."

In writing to Mr. Leslie Stephen, in the year 1896, he said :—

"I always feel that this life is worthless without the idea of *permanence* in the affections, and I am afraid I reiterate the thought too often in my writings. And the very idea of Evolution, if upbuilt of limitless death and suffering, is horrible without some further explanation. . . . I know that I am struggling in deep waters and can land on neither side—neither on the side of orthodox Religion, nor on that of outright Materialism—so that I am in danger of pleasing no one. But I have a very clear idea, nevertheless, of where I am drifting. Intellectually speaking, I find no ground whatever for believing in a Divine solution of this puzzle—emotionally, I feel surer. I cannot say that I am of your opinion that this life is worth anything without another and a higher. Frankly I hope I shall never think so."

Meanwhile his father's editorship thrived, and he

soon became the proprietor of the paper. By that time the *Glasgow Sentinel*, though still of limited circulation, was a recognised power in Glasgow. The heaven was slowly working. After the abolition of the stamp duty on newspapers the *Sentinel* acquired, with a large increase of subscribers and purchasers, an increase of influence in due proportion. Meantime, for the better furtherance of the boy's education he was sent to a boarding-school at Rothesay, in the Island of Bute.

It was a small school, kept by a person named Munro, whom Robert afterwards recalled as a delicate, gentle, pink-complexioned man, who would sit in the middle of the schoolroom bathing his poor aching head with cold water, and suffering all the martyrdom of nervous headache. The boarders were chiefly boys from Glasgow or the neighbourhood, but there were a couple of dingy-complexioned lads from Demerara, and several little girls from the same mysterious region. If the boy's religious studies had been previously neglected, they were now vigorously and rigorously pursued. The good schoolmaster, catering for pious parents, dosed his scholars daily with long Scripture lessons and hymns to be got by heart. There were prayers too, morning and evening, grace before and after meat, while on Sunday the scholars were marched away to Port Bannatyne to hear two services and two long sermons, with an interval between for refreshments, consisting of a few biscuits partaken of in a chilly schoolroom attached to the "kirk." Sick as he had become of social outlawry, the boy thought all this highly proper and respectable, not that it failed to bore him as it did the others, not that he failed to slumber tranquilly during the sermon, or to play odds-and-evens with marbles

during the service, but he always looked back on those days as among the happiest of his life. Most of his schoolfellows had had a surfeit of Sabbatarianism, from infancy upwards, and cordially hated the very name of the Sabbath, but he, to whom it was a new experience, found the pious influence most refreshing. In later years he never heard the church bells, but he recalled with a thrill of pleasure that peaceful time.

He often spoke, too, of the intense home-sickness which possessed him in those days, and which mastered him like a passion. He had the gentlest and fondest of mothers, and it was torture to him to be away from her side—torture deepened by the long and loving letters which she sent him almost daily. "My life has been a turbulous one," he said, "not free from bitter sorrows, but never since have I endured a keener anguish than possessed me when homesick in those boyish days. I would sit for hours together, with the tears streaming down my face, looking across the dark waters of the firth, and thinking of my home—so near and yet so far away."¹

I mention this home-sickness because, with it, began his first promptings to express emotion in that poetic art by the pursuit of which he is now chiefly known. About that time, at any rate, he began to scribble verses. Of many of these verses his mother was the theme, but some years later he one day recalled for our edification two abominable lines which had for subject a certain young lady of dazzling beauty whom he met at a school party, one Halloween. The name of this divinity was Rebecca, and she was a farmer's daughter, and he addressed to

¹ Letter to Mr. Gentles.

her his first love poem, which culminated as follows:—

“O, were she mine, with countless gems I’d deck her,
And give my all to beautiful Rebecca!”

About that time he became a refractory and troublesome pupil. What between homesickness and natural restlessness of temperament, he was soon driven to open mutiny. On one occasion when returning to school in one of the Clyde steamers after a brief holiday, he left the boat at Dunoon, immersed himself bodily in the sea, and taking the next boat home again appeared before his mother dripping and bedraggled, saying that he had fallen overboard and had narrowly escaped drowning. His story was discredited and he was sent away again in no little disgrace. But from that hour he was determined not to remain in the boarding-school, and went steadily to work to get himself expelled. He must have been a sore trial to his schoolmaster, for a gentleman writing to him some years later, asked, naïvely, “Were you that devil of a boy who was at school with my daughter at Rothesay?”

I am afraid there is no doubt that he had fairly earned the title of “a devil of a boy.” His mischief-making culminated in a ridiculous episode, worthy to be chronicled in the *Boy’s Journal*. After many days of mutinous planning, during which he devised a wild scheme to quit the school and seek his fortune, he succeeded in persuading two of his schoolfellows to join him in running away. Robert had armed himself with an old pistol, the lock of which was broken, and which required infinite persuasion before it would go off, but for all that he felt a positive desperado ready

to sell his life dearly should violent hands be laid upon him. Early one day the three boys left the school and ran to Rothesay, some two miles distant. The moment their absence was discovered they were pursued, caught, and brought ignominiously back. Next morning Mr. Munro took Robert into his private room, and after giving him a long and very sensible lecture, informed him that he must leave the school, as he was a mutinous spirit which it was necessary to expel. The very next day, therefore, he was sent home to Glasgow.

To one other episode of his life at Rothesay I may briefly allude before I pass on to other matters. A little before he planned to run away he had fallen desperately in love, the object of his affections being a little girl whom he had met at a school dance. He was just twelve years old, she about nine, and their love seemed to be a very passionate business indeed. One day she told him she was going away with her parents. Stunned by the news, the boy implored her to remain, but it was of no avail. A little later their last meeting came, taking place in a "close" at Rothesay. "Again and again," he said, when describing this incident, "my youthful Juliet rushed into my arms, again and again our tears mingled together. She went and I never saw her again. The parting was a blow to me, and helped to create the spirit of recklessness which was the ultimate cause of my being expelled from the school."

So, at twelve years of age, he had already begun to live. Love, innocent but potent had already found him out, and childish sorrow had deepened love's impression. By that time he was writing verses and beginning to understand the magic of the word "poetry." Nor had Nature neglected her ministra-

tions. In the sea-girt little island of Bute he had become familiar with two great natural phenomena—the hills and the ocean. He carried away with him visions of the sunset clouds on Goatfell, of moonlight on the waters, of sunlight on the open heathery moor. Not till some years later, when he read Wordsworth, did he learn to look on Nature with the eye of a poet or a lover, but the love for sea and mountains which afterwards became his passion and his inspiration began with his school life on the Clyde.

By this time Mr. Buchanan was a fairly prosperous newspaper proprietor, owning besides the *Sentinel* two other newspapers which he had started, the *Glasgow Times* and the *Penny Post*. He had taken a flat in the West end of Glasgow, close to the Park, and there, when his son left Rothesay, he resided with his parents. His first day-school was the Glasgow Academy, where he attended the Latin classes of Doctor Corrie. From the Academy he passed on to the High School, attending the French and English classes under teachers whose names I have heard but forget, and the Latin classes under Doctor Lowe, whom he ever remembered as the kindest of schoolmasters and who first instructed him in the mysteries of the manufacture of Latin verse. Now that he was able to pursue his studies at home he was perfectly happy, the more so, owing to the fact that in addition to his very perfunctory work at school, he was already beginning to compose both prose and verse, and contributing anonymously before he was fifteen years of age to one of the Glasgow daily newspapers, and one, moreover, which did not belong to his father. His effusions were printed and he was, of course, in the seventh heaven of delight.

His early flights into the fields of literature were not discountenanced. His first efforts delighted his mother and, better still, did not displease his father, and it was soon whispered about that the infidel editor's curly-headed son was a poet in embryo. That being so, he found a friendly sympathiser and adviser. At that time Mr. Buchanan's literary lieutenant on his newspapers was called Hugh Macdonald. He was an artizan who had turned poet and become a writer for the press. He was a great pedestrian and knew every hill, stream, clump of woodland, old castle and wayside inn for miles round the smoky city. He was besides a practical botanist and could tell the name of every flower which grew in that region. He was also familiar with the names and notes of all the birds. But his knowledge was specially that of a poet. If a bird or flower had a sweet Doric name, if it was celebrated in old or modern song, he knew it. His talk was full of the music of Scottish glens, and a day out among the woods with him was a delight to be remembered.

As Macdonald was in Mr. Buchanan's employment, and a frequent guest at his house, the youthful poet soon made his acquaintance, and when he discovered that the boy had a turn for writing verse he did all he could to foster the aspiration. He bought the lad's first long poem, a weird and wondrous ballad, for half a crown, and published it in the *Glasgow Times*, hugely to the delight of the author, of course. From that time forth he dubbed himself the lad's "literary godfather." But the chief boon he conferred upon his godson was the knowledge of his delightful personality. Hitherto the men with whom Robert had come in contact were, with few exceptions, prose

men, political and social reformers of harsh and arid experience, always excepting his father, who loved the Muses with all his soul. But Hugh Macdonald was different. He "babbled o' green fields," he could sing old Scotch songs and recite old Scotch ballads in a way to fire the blood. He first of all made the boy aware of the magic of the simple speech of the lyrics woven by Tannahill and Motherwell, of the broad, human touch of Burns, of the winsome tenderness of such fireside singers as William Miller, and when he grew to manhood he never forgot this debt. Under this influence he discovered that the smoky city, and the cities in its neighbourhood, were very birdsnests of melody, full of happy singers who made songs to the trotting of the ploughman's team and the whuzzing of the loom. The very air was full of poetry. Why, in the adjacent town of Paisley alone the poets were to be counted by thousands. Macdonald knew them all. Wherever he went with his stout staff in his hand he was a welcome guest. He seems, however, to have had one failing, which, alas! was too common among the Scotchmen of that time, he was too fond of what is called "the social glass," and as he grew older he yielded more and more to that temptation. When he left Mr. Buchanan's employment to assume a more lucrative post on another newspaper, the son saw little or nothing of him. He died shortly afterwards in the very prime of his manhood.

But it was not merely personal influence like that of Hugh the Rambler which filled the boy's soul with the impulse to write and sing. As I have said, the whole air he breathed was alive with music, from the piercing notes of the old ballads to the tear- and laughter-compelling songs of Burns. Wherever he

went, into fine house or poor cottage, down dark streets or across green fields, the poets were whistling away like so many blackbirds, the living emulating the dead, and the dead as vocal as if they were only newly born! How could a boy resist the magic? Why, he heard more music and inhaled more poetical delight in one short Scottish summer than he might have done in London during many years. It is more than likely that if you stopped a policeman on his beat in the streets of Glasgow, you would find that he was a poet, and that he knew his Shakespeare and even his Shelley, to say nothing of his Burns!

At that time there was at all events one true poet living in Glasgow, but the youth did not meet him till several years later. His name was William Freeland; the name is still his, for he is still living, and in the same city, and he wrote very touchingly of Robert Buchanan's death.

"I knew him as a handsome and healthy lad in Glasgow, and I have followed his career, generally with admiration, and often with astonishment. He was ever a fighter, and there was a time when, full of life and vigour, it might have been predicted that he would live to a brave and bright old age. It was in his father's paper that he began to 'strike the lyre,' and he did so in a manner which foreshadowed the future poet. It is by his poetry that his name will live, and if the opinion of one or two excellent critics may be trusted, his fame is fairly well assured. One of these critics was the late Mr. R. H. Hutton, of the *Spectator*, who, in noticing an edition of his collected works, could hardly put a limit to his praise. 'To our mind,' said Mr. Hutton, 'after long knowledge of his poems, they seem to us nearly perfect of their kind, realistic and idealistic alike in the highest sense.' Mr. Steadman,

in referring to 'Willie Baird,' one of the 'Idyls of Inverburn,' described him as a 'most faithful poet to Nature'; saying further: 'He is her familiar, and in this respect it would seem as if the mantle of Wordsworth had fallen to him from some fine sunset or misty height.' These are friendly words, but they are not unwarranted—in whatever form Mr. Buchanan wrote, he was never false to his poetic function. He was a poet of a high order, and his best poetry is rich with beauty and music and truth."

CHAPTER IV

YOUTH, 1856-58

FROM the High School, where he acquired a fair knowledge of Latin, Robert Buchanan passed on to the University, where he took the Latin course under Ramsay and the Greek under Lushington. The last-named Professor had a wonderful interest in the boy's eyes,¹ for it was reported that he knew Tennyson.

During his studies at the University the young poet had a tutor, a mild and kindly man who did his best to keep his pupil close to his studies, but who usually failed, for at that time one Temple of Pleasure above all was attracting him, and that was the theatre, to which his father's position as a newspaper proprietor gave him the privilege of constant entrance.

"Among the few imperishable Dramas which are not merely poetical but greatly and truly human, I think that the 'King Lear' of Shakespeare stands supreme. This work was the one with which I first became acquainted, at a time when all my boyish soul was hungry for the teaching of great Poetry.

"I was then a boy in Glasgow, and the elder Vandenhoff was playing in Scotland, accompanied by his niece, known as 'Miss Vandenhoff.' When they

came to the West of Scotland I saw them in nearly all their impersonations, and also attended their public readings of the 'Antigone' of Sophocles; it was not, however, until I saw the play of 'Lear' for the first time, with Vandenhoff as the old King and his niece as Cordelia, that I fully realised the significance of the great tragedy.

"To this day I retain the impression left upon me by this performance, without parallel in my experience for splendour and pathos of poetical effect. Compared with much of the other work of Shakespeare, this play of 'Lear' towers solitary and supreme: and to turn to it from such fustian as 'King John' and other of the historical plays, is to leave what Mr. Walkley calls the 'padded room' and come face to face with a modern mind and a nobler spirit. It is the fashion, of course, to treat all the great dramatist's work as if it was impeccable; whereas a portion of the work he did for the stage was almost beneath contempt, both in subject and in treatment. Curiously enough, some of his least inspired productions are the very ones which hold possession of the stage. 'King Lear' is seldom or never represented, for the reason possibly that it demands greater insight and a larger method in its exponents than are nowadays forthcoming on the boards. I have seen several Lears since the Lear of Vandenhoff, but all of them seemed to me either uninspired, or melodramatic or inarticulate. Unfortunately I missed the Lear of Salvini, which possessed, I am assured, remarkable qualities.

"But for me, 'King Lear' remains, and will remain, the soul-moving poem which swept me beyond myself when I was a boy. I feel now, as I felt then, the unapproachable truth and sublimity of such passages

as the one in Act III., where the storm-beaten Monarch first realises the mystery of human wretchedness and pain. Here, and in many other passages, the very quick of Pity is touched. From the soul-moving situation, where the old man's tremulous hands reach out to *feel* the tears on the lids of his sobbing daughter, down to the crowning pathos, the heart-breaking last cry, the whole story moves on to such music as has never been made by poet either before or since, culminating in the solemn words of Kent, uttered just before the curtain falls. I feel still, as I felt more than thirty years ago, that this work of Shakespeare ranks among the highest possible achievements of the human mind. Yet the speech in which it is written, observe, is the simple speech of ordinary life, which, with all its wonderful modulations, is as natural to-day as in the day when it was first uttered.

"The influence on my own character of this masterpiece was deep and abiding. I first gained from it that perception of the piteousness of life which has been, despite all aberrations into contemporary savagery, the inspiration of all my writings. To me the storm-tost figure of Lear represented Humanity itself, swept hither and thither by the elemental and seemingly aimless cruelty of Nature, yet coming at last to anchorage, so far as the individual is concerned, in an equally elemental peace and calm. I was taught by the contemplation of his wretchedness, as he himself was taught by personal strife and sorrow, to feel for that sorrow of which I had hitherto taken 'too little care.' In weeping for him I wept for all those who suffer, either through their own passions or through the anarchy of society, and from that time forward I was alert to catch any genuine

cri du cœur from the troubled waters of the world. Other influences, of course, co-operated—my upbringing among the Socialists, my mother's supreme sympathy for all suffering, my general reading in the literature I was beginning to love—but I think, nay, I am sure, that 'King Lear' focussed my feelings into humanitarianism, and gave to my mind no little of the human sympathy which I hope it possesses. I mention this, not to claim any special interest for my own literary development, but to emphasise the belief I have long held—that environment shapes character, for good or evil, quite as much as natural temperament and inherited qualities. Up to a certain period of my boyhood I was, I think, indifferent to suffering, capable of selfish cruelty, careless of all pain save my own. From the moment that I drank into my being the full significance of Shakespeare's tragedy I possessed a clue to all the mystery of Life, and realised that if I personally had ever any message to deliver, it would be a message on behalf of suffering humanity.

"I learned also from 'King Lear' another thing, which I have never quite forgotten—the truth that *simplicity* of thought and phrase is the inevitable characteristic of all great literary work. The more I studied the masterpiece (and of course I rushed from the playhouse to study the printed text), the more I saw that its effects were obtained by absolute truth to nature and to the language of common life. In the finest passages, words of one syllable predominated, strong Saxon words for the most part, rendered poetically wonderful by the magic of their phrasing. Like many young readers, and like all young poets, I was charmed, of course, by the verbal felicity in which Shakespeare still remains supreme. I lingered like a

lover over such expressions as: 'drinks the green mantle of the deadly pool,' 'as mad as the vexed sea,' 'strange œiliads and most speaking looks,' 'the shrill-gorged lark,' 'the wheel has come full circle,—I am here,' and a hundred others more or less apt and masterful. Of course these things concerned the mere vocabulary of poetical art, but if I needed any clue to the cunning of great Literature, they supplied it to me. I was thenceforth free of the realms of Poesy, so far as its masonic signs are concerned. It took me many a long year to discover that, without a deeper and more abiding inspiration, the masonic signs meant nothing, though I may remark, *en passant*, that I know of no instance in literature where consummate mastery of verbal expression is associated with deficient intellectual power. Even Keats, the least meditative and the most passionate of all the poets and the nearest in power of verbal magic to Shakespeare, was intellectually prescient to the inmost fibres of his poetical being—pure absolute thinking and conceiving power being at the very root of his unexampled sensuous instinct, and leading him to those miracles of phrasing in which, I conceive, he has no modern rival. It so happened that at the very time when my eyes were becoming opened to the secrets of human imagination, while hungry, with a lad's insensate hunger, for the thrills of Life itself, that chance threw me among the very men who were the liege servants of the great Dramatist; and a rare crowd they were, with much of the savagery, but no little of the personal charm, of Shakespeare's own contemporaries.

"The Theatre Royal, Glasgow, was then under the management of Edmund Glover, a man of remarkable gifts, full-blooded, able, and quick both in thought

and execution, an actor of power and passion, fascinating and humorous. As my father was the editor and proprietor of a leading local newspaper, I had free entrance to the Theatre, which I haunted in and out of season; but not satisfied with this, I followed the Players into the privacy of their lives, or such doubtful privacy as they found in the hostelry round the corner. Well, they were for the most part merry fellows, wild in their ways, loose in their gait and their conversation, living in an atmosphere which constantly reminded me of that breathed by Falstaff and the rogues of his following. It would be idle to deny that they were not a sober crew—their spirits and their manners were ever under the influence of my Host of the Garter, for the actor then was still a vagabond, who had not yet acquired the respectability of the counter-jumper or the fine airs of the man about town. Such as they were I loved them, and I am still quite sure that they were true kinsmen and leal descendants of the players who lived and died in the times of good Queen Bess. Morals they had none, or none to boast of; they tippled, they swaggered, they ran after petticoats and petticoats ran after them; but the spirit of the savage old literature ran in their veins like blood, and they had the fine qualities of their defects. Their very speech was archaic, their very oaths were reminiscent of Bardolph and Pistol. Tom Powerie, Henry Vivash, Harry Ashley, George Vincent—these are some of the names that recur to me as I think of those wild young days. Powerie was the best Falconbridge I ever encountered, either on or off the stage; as reckless, as fiery, as masterful as the great Bastard himself. He died early, the victim of his own fierce energy and abandonment. Henry Vivash drifted to

London and died there in harness. Ashley became famous afterwards as a wonderful impersonator of quaint 'old men,' especially in comic opera. George Vincent came to London also, startling the city by his wonderful performance of Melter Moss when the 'Ticket-of-leave Man' was first produced, and afterwards, in other productions at the Olympic, showing an extraordinary versatility.

"To the boy on the threshold of life, still a student in his quieter hours, these men were wonderful beyond measure, for they were, as I have suggested, Shakespeare's men—virile, reckless, and strangely merry—and their presence in that sad Sabbatarian City, from whose blessings and sympathies they were outcast, was to all seeming as wonderful as themselves. I learned to know them well, and, as I have said, to love them, and I still think that the hours I spent with them were far from wasted. Among them, for a short period, drifted a young player of another nature, afterwards known to the world as Henry Irving. A quiet, studious young man, even then ambitious, but exhibiting little talent even as a 'walking gentleman,' I was much drawn to him by his thoughtful personality, so different to the wilder personalities of his companions, and I took him to my father's house and introduced him to my mother. He went away suddenly, and the last message I had from him came in the shape of a long letter dated from the British Museum in London."¹

The boy might have had a worse environment than he was blessed with in Glasgow during those early years when he inhaled the atmosphere of freethought among his father's friends. At that time he had several friends of his own, students like himself, but

¹ "Latter Day Leaves."

none for whom he greatly cared, so he was thrown for companionship into the society of grown men, all many years his senior. In this respect, therefore, he was somewhat lonely, until one day Providence sent him a comrade only a few years older than himself, but even more boyish and unsophisticated in the world's ways. His name was David Gray, and he was then, while preparing for the University, a pupil teacher in connection with the Normal schools.

The two youthful poets, who were destined to become such friends, first met at a cricket match on Glasgow Green, to which they had both been invited by a mutual friend, Mr. John Steven, and after the match there was a supper given to the young cricketers, at which both David Gray and Robert Buchanan was present. David Gray was very diffident and retiring by nature, but on that eventful evening it seems he was the life and soul of the little gathering.

From the beginning of their boyish friendship David Gray, although he was the elder, always leant upon his friend, and was influenced both for good and evil by his more strenuous and pertinacious character. There was also this curious feature in their relationship, that Robert Buchanan had been bred among comparatively educated people, superior in social station to the peasantry among whom Gray was reared. His knowledge of his lowly origin made him very diffident, even to the extent of dreading and avoiding cultivated society, more particularly that of educated women ; he preferred to mix with men and women of the lower classes, with whom he was thoroughly at home.

"It always struck me as rather droll," said the poet, "that I should stand in this relationship to my

friend, for my own family was certainly not aristocratic in any sense of the word, but so it was, and even my own dear mother regarded David as practically a social inferior, very gauche in manner, and almost boorish in his silent and bashful ways. Few people saw him as I saw him—free, natural, and unconstrained. Alone with me, or in the company of kindred spirits like myself, he became transformed, even physically; his tongue was loosened, his eyes flashed fire, and he was to all intents and purposes another being. But despite all this I was generally the one to lead, he the one to follow; and he followed me, I fear, into many queer scenes and into a great deal of doubtful company.

“Poor David, not in one respect only but in a hundred respects he was too frail and sensitive for this rough world, and it is little wonder that he withered up so soon at the first breath of its unkindness. He was woman-like in both face and form, and he was woman-like too in his sympathies and disposition. His feelings were like running water, for ever changing, passionately pure, ineffably soft and tender, yet the sport of every wind that blew. Of the two I was by far the most introspective, my emotions being always tempered by purely mental impressions. His only taste was for poetry pure and simple—verse poetry from that of Shakespeare to that of Burns, and neither religion nor philosophy awakened his interest. Partly from natural disposition, partly through my early training, I was altogether different. Poetry to me was merely the handmaid of the severer Muses. True I ‘lisped in numbers,’ but less for the mere music’s sake than for some strange clue it seemed to give to the subtler business of life and thought. I had steeped myself

in all the philosophical literature of the last century, more particularly that of the English Deists and the French materialists, and I was already beginning to ask myself if there was any clue to life's mystery. To David there was no mystery about it, to him life was a golden wonder and delight flooded with the memories of the great singers. He heard nothing else, cried for nothing else; poetry was his absolute life and death. Nevertheless I shared his enthusiasm and rapture when we began linking hands, as it were, to thread our delightful way through the Wonderland of the English Muses. We sat and read together, often turning night into day, and comparing our impressions of the books we read. In my father's library was Anderson's edition of the English Poets, closely printed in double columns and extending to fourteen or fifteen volumes, including verse translations of the classics. We waded gladly and unweariedly through these enormous tomes, though they consisted for the most part of sad rubbish. But among the rubbish there was solid gold, of course. It was in this edition that Gray first read Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women' and Drayton's poems, and Milton's 'Paradise Lost' and 'Paradise Regained,' underlining all the precious passages."¹

Robert treasured those volumes all his life, and he has often pointed out to me the "precious passages" marked by Gray's own hand. "Neither of us at that time cared much for the classic poets of Greece or Rome. Gray was a fairly good Latin scholar, but had very little Greek, and such poor scholarship as I possess came to me afterwards, when I revived the impression of what I had learned at school and college. It seems to me singular now that although

¹ Letter to Mr. Gentles.

I had a boy's familiarity with Homer and Virgil I never seemed to go to those sources for the phrasing which bewitched me so much in the poets of my native land. To me they were class books, and little more. The explanation is no doubt that Shakespeare and the rest took such absolute possession of me, that they left me no room to seek elsewhere the verbal felicities which I loved so much." ¹

It will be seen that even at that time he was beginning to realise that poetry in its highest and best aspect meant far more than mere phrases or beautiful ideas. It was to him inspiration, imagination, religion. The supreme tragedy of "King Lear" softened his character, and flooded his soul with human pity. Next to that in influence came, I think, the first reading of Wordsworth, whom he ever regarded as one of the greatest of modern poets. The one-volume edition of Wordsworth, published by Moxon, had been given to him by his father as a present on his fourteenth birthday. It was in every way a priceless gift, and before long he had nearly all the poems by heart. The other poets were to him beautiful singers, but Wordsworth he felt was a prophet and a seer. He alone knew Nature at the fountain head, he alone delivered oracles, some of which sounded to the boy's soul like the very voice of Nature's God.

¹ Letter to Mr. Gentles.

CHAPTER V

FLIGHT TO LONDON, 1859

IN or about the year 1859 Robert Buchanan the elder became insolvent, and a full chorus of his friends and enemies averred that he had brought the catastrophe upon himself by reckless speculation and extravagant living. His wife shared this delusion and resented, chiefly for her son's sake, the sudden change in their fortunes. The boy had been reared and educated in the belief that the newspaper business which his father had established was a kind of indestructible property guaranteeing for his son and heir at least a competence for life. How the lad's fortunes would have shaped had this really been the case one cannot of course divine; as it was, he found himself at eighteen years of age without any prospect before him (since he had been put to no profession), and bereft at one blow of what had seemed an independence. At that moment, however, his sympathies appear to have been with his father; and partly perhaps because he did not quite realise what the change in his own prospects meant, partly because his sense of justice divined at once that the change was the result of simple accident, he was

righteously indignant with those summer friends who visited his father with such bitter blame.

In point of fact the very enterprise which had enabled Mr. Buchanan to succeed was the sole or chief cause of his ultimate downfall and ruin. Coming almost unknown to Glasgow, he had practically founded the *Glasgow Sentinel* as an organ of freethought and liberal opinion and had gradually established in connection with that newspaper a prosperous printing business. Encouraged by his success he had added to his ventures the *Glasgow Times* and the *Penny Post*. For years fortune favoured him, and everything he touched succeeded. It was not until he was tempted to extend his ventures beyond the locality where he resided that the tide of his fortunes seems to have turned. He became involved in serious liabilities and finally failed to meet his responsibilities.

The blow must have been a heavy one, but Mr. Buchanan felt it chiefly on account of his wife—he himself was too light-hearted, too hopeful, too unselfish to fret much over his own misfortunes. “Even had I never loved my father before, I should have loved and venerated him then for the patience and gentleness with which he accepted the blow. All his friends, or nearly all, turned from him, and did much to embitter his position, but he never moaned or complained, he uttered no word of self-pity, and he seemed utterly incapable of remembering, with the slightest resentment, the cruel conduct of some of those who had called themselves his friends. I had long, even as a boy, perceived that goodness and kindness as estimated by the world were very composite qualities. My father, I know, was not a good man—not, that is to say, a moral man in the strict

sense—his relations with my mother were not happy, and he was to no little extent to blame, and in many respects he was weak as water. But looking back over the years I see in him who had so many faults a nobility, a loving-kindness which I have scarcely seen in any other man. For the rest he was a childish creature, dear and simple as a child. His very faults were childish, nay, his very vices, but it is much to be able to say of him—what could not be said of one man in a thousand—that in all my recollection of him I cannot remember one cruel or unkind act, or even one unkind word.”¹

The Scottish method of dealing with the insolvent is swift and speedy, and Mr. Buchanan found himself in a moment, as it were, stripped bare of his remaining substance and thrust out into the streets to face the world. Even then he was not daunted, but prepared with reckless energy to start another newspaper! It was at this juncture that the boy, who seemed to have inherited a good deal of his father's dauntless spirit, went to his mother and proposed to her that he should start for London to seek his fortune. It was clear, he said, that he could do nothing in Glasgow, where he was only a burden on his father's scanty resources. In London, on the other hand, he could at least secure a maintenance of some sort. Long and anxious were the talks he had with his mother until, finding it quite impossible to gain her consent to the separation, he, not, as he afterwards said, without many regrets, made arrangements to leave his home without her knowledge.

He had long dreamed of taking the world by storm, for his boyish heart was full of recollections of the mighty dead who had fallen or triumphed, and

¹ Letter to Mr. Gentles.

even if his father had continued to prosper, I think he would eventually have tried his fortune in London as so many others had done, but of course he would then have done so under less cruel a handicap—as it was he had scarcely a shilling in the world.

For eighteen years he had never known what it was to suffer privation or to want money; he had been reared in comparative luxury, in a bright and happy home, the spoiled darling of a loving mother, but he felt that in arranging to go from home, even under circumstances so disadvantageous, he surely could not come to harm. Thus it was that on Saturday, the 5th of May, 1860, he set forth from the Central Railway Station, Glasgow, and, after he had paid his third-class fare to London, had only a few shillings in his pocket with which to face the world. In one respect, however, he was better equipped than most young literary adventurers—he had an excellent stock of clothes, and amongst it a sumptuous silk-quilted dressing-gown, which his mother had bought for him just before his father failed. Once fairly started on his journey, he sat in a corner of the carriage as miserable a lad as could be. “As one by one my companions fell asleep in the darkness, my heart swelled and my eyes were dim with tears, as I realised for the first time that I was quite friendless and alone. I thought of my dear mother praying for me at home, and I longed to turn back and ask her forgiveness for the pain I had caused her. Even now I never take a railway journey in the night without again realising the dismal heartache of that midnight journey to London.”¹

He had made no plans to guide him on entering the great city, nor had he any personal acquaintances

¹ Letter to Mr. Gentles.

there who might give him a helping hand. Shortly before his father's misfortune he had sent some verses to Hepworth Dixon, who had printed them in the *Athenæum*, then under his editorship, and he had some faint hope that Mr. Dixon might give him a little work. He had corresponded also with George Henry Lewes and Bryan Procter (Barry Cornwall), both of whom had strongly dissuaded him from attempting to live by literature. Sydney Dobell, another of his correspondents, lived far away from London, and was unlikely to be able to be of much service to him in the metropolis. He had no plans, and literally no prospects.

As ill-luck would have it, he managed to lose his railway ticket, and when it was asked for he had to confess the loss. After some delay he was suffered to proceed, but on his arrival at the terminus he was treated like a culprit, and marched off to the superintendent's office. The result was that his luggage was detained, pending inquiries at Glasgow, and he walked away into the streets of London without any personal effects whatever. But his heart was light. The morning had brought bolder thoughts; with youth and strength on his side he seemed to be ready for any emergency that might happen, so after telegraphing to his mother that he was safe and well, he swaggered forth into the Euston Road.

He must have breakfasted somewhere—possibly in one of the numerous coffee-houses close to King's Cross Station—but that episode he could never recall. His next recollection was of strolling carelessly forward in the early forenoon and making his way in the direction of Regent's Park. Lonely and sick at heart he wandered hither and thither, hungering to accost one of the many strangers who passed him by,

but he was young, so he went on in silence till he found a green spot in the Park, when he threw himself down and began to think.

“As I lay thus seeing the bright sunlight through a mist of boyish tears, I was conscious of a pair of eyes steadfastly regarding me. They belonged to a youth of about my own age, who was sprawling on the grass and smoking a clay pipe. His head was close-cropped and his general expression pugilistic, but he looked good-humoured. He reminded me instantly of the famous Mr. Dawkins, better known as the Artful Dodger, and by that token he was quite as ragged and disreputable-looking. We got into conversation, and presently on hearing that I was without a home, he invited me to accompany him to his quarters in the neighbourhood of Shore-ditch. I was so friendless and lonely that I would have gone anywhere with the devil himself if he had invited me, and late that afternoon I found myself in the east of London, in a sort of low lodging-house, or thieves’ kitchen. It is all like a dream now, but I remember my new friend was very kind to me, and saved me from impolite attentions on the part of his companions. The whole place reminded me of ‘*Oliver Twist*,’ and I fancy Fagin was there as well as my friend the Dodger, whose bed I shared that night, throwing myself full dressed upon it, and sleeping like a top till morning. There were other beds in the wretched room, and other youths and men of my friend’s persuasion, but no one molested me, and, what is more wonderful, no one robbed me of the small sum in my pocket. I rose up in the early dawn and shook hands with my friend, who was still half asleep. I never saw him again, but I often think of him with gratitude for his kindness to me, a stranger.

"I took some breakfast at a coffee-stall in Shore-ditch, and then strolled westwards through the crowded streets, past the Bank, and along Newgate Street to the Old Bailey, and thence into Fleet Street and along the Strand. I had no particular object and went along still like one in a dream, even as a straw drifts with the current of a brook, indifferent whither it goes or where it rests. I was in London, that was enough for me; accident, fortunate, or the reverse, would do the rest. The glory of my youth was on me, I saw everything around me with enchanted eyes!"¹

He was still puzzled what to do, when he bethought him of a schoolfellow who had been with him at Merton, and whose father, one of the Socialistic brotherhood, had a business somewhere in the Edgware Road, which business turned out to be a prosperous ham and beef shop, where food could be purchased for home use, or consumed on the premises. He did not find his schoolfellow, but he interviewed the father, who stood behind the counter arrayed in a white apron, and before many minutes had passed Robert was seated at a table devouring a plateful of ham and beef, while the good man stood over him questioning him about his position. "I forget whether he gave me any further assistance in the shape of money, but I fancy that he did not, although he made me promise to come to him again if I needed assistance. It is more than likely that I concealed from him the full extent of my poverty, although I accepted gratefully his hospitable offer of a good square meal. I was very doubtful as to where I should look for my next night's longing, and was still debating what to do, when I remembered a

¹ Letter to Mr. Gentles.

friend who owed both my father and mother a large debt of gratitude for kindness received. His name was Merriman. At the time when my father was a small newsvendor in Holywell Street, Merriman, then a youth, had been a sort of errand boy. At the time of my arrival in London he was studying for the law after several years of busy journalism in the provinces, and, I had no doubt whatever that if I could find him out I should at least obtain from him a temporary shelter. I succeeded in finding him, and no sooner had I appeared than I met with the kindest of welcomes.”¹

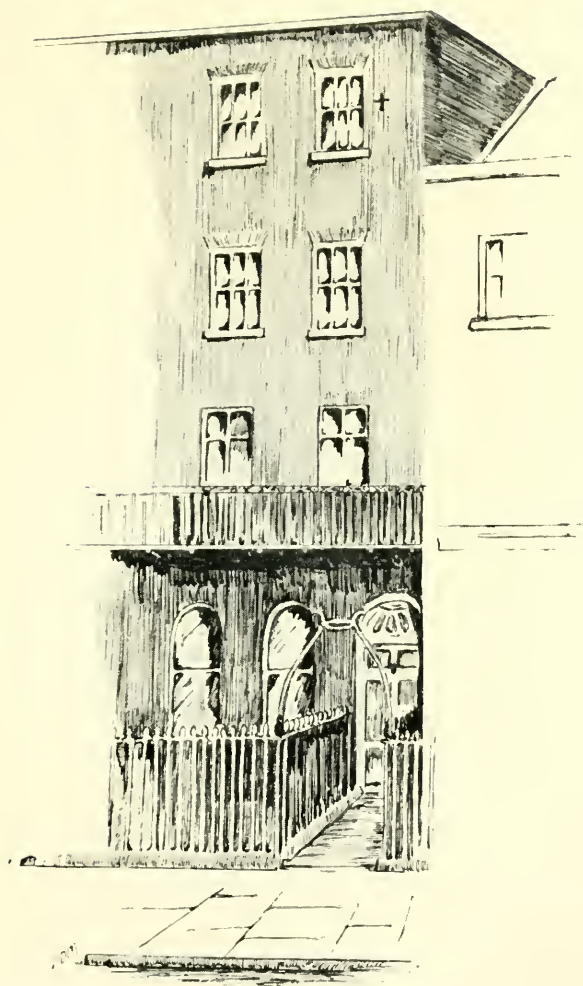
Mr. Merriman was then living with his wife and family in the Euston Road, not far from King’s Cross Railway Station, and when informed of the detention of the luggage he accompanied his youthful guest to claim the property. Information had come from Glasgow that he had not travelled without a ticket, and his small impedimenta were handed to him with apologies, the authorities in Scotland having conveyed the information that his father was a prominent member of the newspaper press, who might make the affair unpleasant.

A week or so later he left the shelter of Mr. Merriman’s roof, and betook himself to the afterwards famous garret, No. 66, Stamford Street, Blackfriars, where he settled down in earnest to begin life in the Great City. The room which he occupied—a bed-sitting-room—was situated at the very top of the lodging-house, and the rent of it was seven shillings a week, including attendance. The furniture was very ramshackle, and the bed, a large old-fashioned wooden one, with a festooned tent or awning overhanging it. There was an old, worn carpet on the

¹ Letter to Mr. Gentles.

floor and a tumbledown armchair by the fireplace; but shabby and dismal as the room was, it was his own, and he rejoiced accordingly. He was alone in the Great City, but he was neither sad nor desolate. In the first place he had his books, the few favourite books which he had brought with him—the tiny Pickering editions of Catullus, Dante, and the Greek New Testament, an old copy of Horace, and the poems of Keats and Shelley. When he had placed them on the mantelpiece and lit his pipe (he smoked a pipe in those days), he felt quite at home. All he required besides was paper, a pen, and some ink, and he was ready to storm the heights of Fame.

He generally took one meal at home—his breakfast, and it consisted mainly of strong tea and bread-and-butter. Now and then, not often, the London egg appeared, as a relish. If he dined at home—and it was very seldom—tea and bread-and-butter formed the meal, but his favourite repast was taken at the Caledonian Coffee House in Covent Garden, and consisted of coffee and muffins, saturated with butter. On Sundays, however, his landlady occasionally sent him up a cut from her own joint. He was supposed, as I have said, to have “attendance.” This consisted in the occasional apparition of a shock-headed Irish servant, very much in the style of the “Marchioness,” who tumbled up and down stairs in a most alarming manner. Apart from this individual he saw no one, except a fellow-lodger who occupied a room on the same floor as his own. He was a printer, and was generally in a state of intoxication. I have often heard the story of how one morning he entered “the garret” in his shirt sleeves, with an open razor in his hand, and besought his neighbour to cut off a button on the neck of his shirt, which he had tried in vain



66, STAMFORD STREET.

to undo. He was relieved from strangulation, whereupon he retired to his own apartment and immediately cut his throat.

Almost daily the young aspirant to literary fame received a letter from his mother, full of loving instructions for his guidance. To one of these missives the following is a reply :—

66, STAMFORD STREET, S.

"Saturday afternoon.

"MY VERY DEAR MOTHER,—I dash off a line or two in answer to your letter, which I have just received. My other letter has gone off, but it is of no consequence.

"In the name of God don't credit for a moment what the common liar says—stuff your ears when those contemptible hounds talk slander into them. If every married woman in the world was to break down under the first falsehood levelled at her husband, or even under the first unpleasant truth, good-bye to Utopia. True or untrue, don't give ear to those infernal tales. Anything, false or true circulated for a sinister, vile purpose is *morally an irretrievable lie*. Human nature learns to endure such things—it *must* endure them. We have all our troubles ; and the troubles resulting from matrimony, although often the keenest, are seldom the most lasting.

"Take the worst like a stoic ! even if, as I do *not* believe, the worst should come. I will earn enough to keep the whole family, if it comes to that. I have kind friends in London who will not see me overcome. I *can* do something yet, thank God. So, for my sake, keep up heart.

"A fall in life is very bitter and trying, but if a man endeavours to climb a precipice and tumbles down in

the attempt, the fall is not necessarily degradation. Again, I say your duty demands woman's strength,—stronger it is than man's strength in such a crisis after all.

“Don't forget that *I* have still hands and a brain, both of which may accomplish miracles. The world is before me, and if I don't tear this lying tongue you talk about out of its jaws, I am a swindler.

“With best and warmest love,

“Your affectionate son,

“ROBERT BUCHANAN.”

This letter, stained and torn and marked with age, came into my possession in a curious manner. I had often heard his mother speak of it with pride—such pride as I think would fill the heart of any woman receiving such a letter from a son barely nineteen years of age; and when she died, in 1894, I found it hidden away among her most treasured belongings. I gave it to her son. A few years later, after his own death, I again found it when looking over his papers, and I give it here, because it seems to me that the spirit which then animated the boy was in after years so eminently characteristic of the man.

CHAPTER VI

EARLY STRUGGLES, 1859

IT was one thing to possess a lodging and to be monarch of all he surveyed over the moonlit tiles of Lambeth ; it was quite another thing to be able to pay the rent, and to command if not the roast beef of old England, at least bread-and-butter. His modest calculation had been that a pound a week would be sufficient for all his needs, including tobacco, but how to earn that pound was another question. Hepworth Dixon, of the *Athenæum*, had given him a few unimportant books to review, in order (as he said) to "get his hand in," but it was uncertain how soon those contributions would be used, and the pay, ten shillings and sixpence per column, was very small. He had sent some papers to *All the Year Round*, but whether they would be accepted or not was still uncertain. His pocket was almost empty when he thought of Bryan Procter (Barry Cornwall), with whom he had corresponded when in Glasgow, and who had, as I have said, warned him not to attempt to live by literature. "The work you now do with pleasure," he wrote, "will possibly become a torture to you, and you will discover, as so many others have done, that what you eat is turned to bitter bread." The boy, full of enthusiasm for his art, had disregarded this warning, and was therefore almost ashamed to present

himself before the man who had given it in vain. So he wrote to the poet telling him that he had come to London, and asking for the honour of an interview. He received an answer almost immediately appointing a meeting at Mr. Procter's house in Weymouth Street, Portland Place. The next morning the youth presented himself, "and I fear my appearance must have been somewhat forlorn, for I vividly remember the looks of gentle sympathy and pity which Procter cast upon me. He was then growing old and was somewhat infirm, but when we talked his eye sparkled and he seemed to forget the burthen of his years. It was pleasant no doubt for the old poet to meet with even a boy-worshipper, one who knew well his works, which the world had already almost forgotten. As I looked into his gentle face I could not but feel reverence for the man who had been the friend of Landor and Southey, and who had lived so long among literary giants. He repeated, with a sad smile, for the mischief was done, his former warning against the literary life, but he promised to help me as far as lay in his power, and as we parted invited me to see him soon again. While I held his hand he pressed into mine something wrapped up in a piece of paper, and as he did so I saw the tears in his eyes. When I got into the street I opened the paper and found three sovereigns! I had said nothing of my extremity, but I presume that the old man guessed it without much prompting." ¹

After that interview the two never met.

"Again and again I proposed going to him, but from one cause or another I never did. It was not that I was ungrateful or forgetful; night after night I thought of "Barry Cornwall," and named him in my

¹ Letter to Mr. Gentles.

prayers, but I had drifted away with the tide of life, and was a stranger even to some of my closest friends. I remember Browning reminding me some years afterwards that Procter had inquired after me, rather wondering that he had never seen me again. Browning, when he was in London, visited the old poet regularly every Sunday. To my shame let it be chronicled¹ that I forgot my duty in this instance, as in many others. I shall always regret that I was so remiss. Before I could make amends Procter had passed away.”¹

In those days, so far as his fellow-craftsmen were concerned, Robert Buchanan was not a little of a recluse, and the habit of keeping apart from professional company remained with him more or less all his life. Hating all intellectual pretensions, and preferring to be simply a man among men, he sought every kind of society save that called “literary,” and was at home everywhere except among literary men. This habit of seclusion grew rather than diminished with age—indeed, during the latter years of his life it became almost a mania with him. On the occasion of our returning from a visit we paid to New York in the year 1885 he was rather taken with one of our fellow-passengers, and during the evenings the two would frequently pace the deck of the ship in earnest conversation, each not having the least idea of the identity of the other. As our journey was nearing its end the stranger came to me one morning and said how sorry he was that we were about to part. “I have quite enjoyed my conversations with your brother,” he said, “he seems to be *so fond of poetry!*”

The admiration which he was unwilling to court he was just as unwilling to give. He was never a hero-worshipper; strength, either of mind or body, did not

¹ Letters to Mr. Gentles.

attract him, while gentle deeds and modest worth invariably did. In point of fact he was a born Bohemian, and cared nothing whatever for the prosperous or successful men. I do not mention this to explain or palliate his forgetfulness with regard to Mr. Procter, or rather I should say his carelessness in acknowledging his obligation to him, for he never forgot a kindness or failed, if occasion came, to repay it. Had the old man been in need of his sympathy, he would have acted differently, but he was happy and prosperous, and so the youth did not hurry to recall himself to his memory.

Another motive may have weighed greatly with him. He was proud as Lucifer, and he hesitated to greet the good old poet again till he could show him that he was no longer a pauper, and that he had done some good work to justify his belief in him. He sent him his first books, and was preparing to follow them into the kindly presence, when he heard to his great regret that the poet was dead.

Meantime he stayed on in his "garret" earning scarcely enough to keep body and soul together, but he never gave up hope or lost heart.

He was not unhappy, indeed he looked back upon that time as one of the happiest in his life. It was only now and then that a sense of desolation came upon him, and he realised his helplessness in the world. The light of Fairyland was still following him, and he had all his young illusions to keep him strong and glad.

But his pride of heart and gladness in mere life were not to be without qualification. His first great experience of the world's sorrow was coming to him, for his dear comrade and companion, David Gray, was about to join him, wounded and broken, after his first flight into the great world of London.

CHAPTER VII

DAVID GRAY, 1860

I N the year 1860, when Robert Buchanan left Glasgow for London, he had arranged to make the journey in the company of his friend. Why he did not do so he himself has told so graphically, in his admirable sketch of the life of his comrade, that I give the story in his own words :—

“In the spring of 1860 we both found ourselves without an anchorage : each found it necessary to do something for daily bread. For some little time the London scheme had been in abeyance ; but, on the 3rd of May, 1860, David came to me, his lips firmly compressed, his eyes full of fire, saying, ‘Bob, I’m off to London.’ ‘Have you funds?’ I asked. ‘Enough for one, not enough for two,’ was the reply. ‘If you can get the money anyhow, we’ll go together.’ On parting we arranged to meet on the evening of the 5th of May, in time to catch the five o’clock train. Unfortunately, however, we neglected to specify which of the two Glasgow stations was intended. At the hour appointed David left Glasgow by one line of railway, in the belief that I had been unable to join him, but determined to try the venture alone. With the same belief and determination I left at the

same hour by the other line of railway. We arrived in different parts of London at about the same time. Had we left Glasgow in company, or had we met immediately after our arrival in London, the story of David's life might not have been so brief and sorrowful.

"Though the month was May, the weather was dark, damp, cloudy. On arriving in the metropolis, David wandered about for hours, carpet bag in hand. The magnitude of the place overwhelmed him; he was lost in that great ocean of life. He thought about Johnson and Savage, and how they wandered through London with pockets more empty than his own; but already he longed to be back in the little carpeted bedroom in the weaver's cottage. How lonely it seemed! Among all that mist of human faces there was not one to smile in welcome: and how was he to make his trembling voice heard above the roar and tumult of those streets? The very policemen seemed to look suspiciously at the stranger. To his sensitively Scottish ear the language spoken seemed quite strange and foreign: it had a painful, homeless sound about it that sank nervously on the heart-strings. As he wandered about the streets he glanced into coffee-shop after coffee-shop, seeing 'Beds' ticketed in each fly-blown window. His pocket contained a sovereign and a few shillings, but he would need every penny. Would not a bed be useless extravagance? he asked himself. Certainly. Where then should he pass the night? In Hyde Park! He had heard so much about this part of London that the name was quite familiar to him. Yes, he would pass the night in the Park. Such a proceeding would save money and be exceedingly romantic; it would be just the right sort of beginning for a poet's

struggle in London! So he strolled into the great Park, and wandered about its purlieus till morning. In remarking upon this foolish conduct, one must reflect that David was strong, heartsome, full of healthy youth. It was a frequent boast of his that he scarcely ever had a day's illness. Whether or not his fatal complaint was caught during this his first night in London is uncertain, but some few days afterwards David wrote thus to his father: 'By the bye, I have had the worst *cold* I ever had in my life. I cannot get it away properly, but I feel a great deal better to-day.' Alas! violent cold had settled down upon his lungs, and insidious death was already slowly approaching him. So little conscious was he of his danger, however, that I find him writing to a friend: 'What brought me here? God knows, for I don't. *Alone* in such a place is a horrible thing. . . . People don't seem to understand me. . . . Westminster Abbey; I was there all day yesterday. If I live I shall be buried there—so help me God! A completely defined consciousness of *great* poetical genius is my only antidote against utter despair and despicable failure.'

"I suppose his purposes in coming to Babylon were about as definite as my own had been, although he had the advantage of being qualified as a pupil teacher. We tossed ourselves on the great waters as two youths who wished to learn to swim, and trusted that by diligent kicking we might escape drowning. There was the prospect of getting into a newspaper office. Again, there was the prospect of selling a few verses. Thirdly, if everything failed, there was the prospect of getting into one of the theatres as supernumeraries. Beyond all this, there was of course the dim prospect that London would at once, and with

acclamations, welcome the advent of true genius, albeit with seedy garments and a Scotch accent. It doubtless never occurred to either that besides mere 'consciousness' of power, some other things were necessary for a literary struggle in London—special knowledge, capability of interesting oneself in trifles, and the pen of a ready writer. What were David's qualifications for a fight in which hundreds miserably fail year after year? Considerable knowledge of Greek, Latin, and French, great miscellaneous reading, a clerkly handwriting and a bold purpose. Slender qualifications, doubtless, but while life lasted there was hope.

“We did not meet for some time after our arrival in London. Finally we came together. David's first impulse was to describe his lodgings, situated in a by-street in the Borough: ‘A cold, cheerless bedroom, Bob; nothing but a blanket to cover me. For God's sake get me out of it!’ We were walking side by side in the neighbourhood of the New Cut. ‘Have you been well?’ I inquired. ‘First rate,’ answered David, looking as merry as possible. Nor did he show any indications whatever of illness; he seemed hopeful, energetic, full of health and spirits; his sole desire was to change his lodging. It was not without qualms that he surveyed the dingy, smoky neighbourhood where I resided. The sun was shedding dismal, crimson light on the chimney-pots, and the twilight was slowly thickening. We climbed up three flights of stairs to my room: dingy as it was, this apartment seemed, in David's eyes, quite a palatial sanctum; and it was arranged that we should take up our residence together. As speedily as possible I procured David's little stock of luggage; then, settled face to face as in old times, we made very merry.

"My first idea, on questioning David about his prospects, was that my friend had had the best of luck. You see, the picture drawn on either side was a golden one ; but the brightness soon melted away. It turned out that David, on arriving in London, had sought out certain gentlemen whom he had formerly favoured with his correspondence, among others, Mr. Richard Monckton Milnes, now Lord Houghton.¹ Though not a little astonished at the appearance of the boy-poet, Mr. Milnes had received him kindly, assisted him to the best of his power, and made some work for him in the shape of manuscript-copying. The same gentleman had also used his influence with literary people—to very little purpose, however. The real truth turned out to be that David was disappointed and low-spirited. 'It's weary work, Bob ; they don't understand me : I wish I was back in Glasgow.' It was now that David told me all about that first day and night in London, and how he had already begun a poem about 'Hyde Park,' how Mr. Milnes had been good to him, had said that he was a 'poet,' but had insisted on his going back to Scotland and becoming a minister. David did not at all like the notion of returning home. He thought he had every chance of making his way in London. About this time he was bitterly disappointed by the rejection of 'The Luggie' by Mr. Thackeray, to whom Mr. Milnes had sent it, with a recommendation that it should be inserted in the *Cornhill Magazine*. . . . It has been seen that Mr. Milnes was the first to perceive that the young adventurer was seriously ill. After a hurried call on his patron one day in May,

¹ Lord Houghton, who afterwards became an intimate friend of Robert Buchanan, died in 1885, and was succeeded by his son, the present Earl of Crewe.

David rejoined me in the near neighbourhood. 'Milnes says I'm to go home and keep warm, and he'll send his own doctor to me.' This was done. The doctor came, examined David's chest, said very little, and went away, leaving strict orders that the invalid should keep within doors and take great care of himself. Neither David nor I liked the expression of the doctor's face at all.

"It soon became evident that David's illness was of a most serious character. Pulmonary disease had set in; medicine, blistering, all the remedies employed in the early stages of his complaint, seemed of little avail. Just then David read the 'Life of John Keats,' a book which impressed him with a nervous fear of impending dissolution. He began to be filled with conceits droller than any he had imagined in health. 'If I were to meet Keats in heaven,' he said one day, 'I wonder if I should know his face from his pictures?' Most frequently his talk was of labour uncompleted, hope deferred; and he began to pant for free country air. 'If I die,' he said on one occasion, 'I shall have one consolation; Milnes will write an introduction to the poems.' At another time, with tears in his eyes, he repeated Burns's epitaph. Now and then, too, he had his fits of frolic and humour, and would laugh and joke over his unfortunate position. It cannot be said that Milnes and his friends were at all lukewarm about the case of their young friend; on the contrary, they gave him every practical assistance. Mr. Milnes himself, full of the most delicate sympathy, trudged to and fro between his own house and the invalid's lodgings, his pockets laden with jelly and beef-tea and his tongue tipped with kindly comfort. Had circumstances permitted, he would have taken the invalid

into his own house. Unfortunately, however, David was compelled to remain, in company with me, in a chamber which seemed to have been constructed peculiarly for the purpose of making the occupants as uncomfortable as possible. There were draughts everywhere: through the chinks of the door, through the windows, down the chimney, and up through the flooring. When the wind blew, the whole tenement seemed on the point of crumbling to atoms; when the rain fell, the walls exuded moisture; when the sun shone, the sunshine only served to increase the characteristic dinginess of the furniture. Occasional visitors, however, could not be fully aware of these inconveniences. It was in the night-time, and in bad weather, that they were chiefly felt: and it required a few days' experience to test the superlative discomfort of what David (in a letter written afterwards) styled 'the dear old ghastly bankrupt garret.' His stay in these quarters was destined to be brief. Gradually the invalid grew homesick. Nothing would content him but a speedy return to Scotland. He was carefully sent off by train, and arrived safely in his little cottage-home far north. Here all was unchanged as ever. The beloved river was flowing through the same fields, and the same familiar faces were coming and going on its banks; but the whole meaning of the pastoral pageant had changed, and the colour of all was deepening towards the final sadness.

"Great, meanwhile, had been the commotion in the handloom weaver's cottage after the receipt of this bulletin: 'I start off to-night at five o'clock by the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway, right on to London, in good health and spirits.' A great cry arose in the household. He was fairly 'daft'; he was throwing away all his chances in the world; the verse-

writing had turned his head. Father and mother mourned together. The former, though incompetent to judge literary merit of any kind, perceived that David was hot-headed, only half educated, and was going to a place where thousands of people were starving daily. But the suspense was not to last long. The darling son, the secret hope and pride, came back to the old people, sick to death. All rebuke died away before that pale sad face and feeble tottering body: and David was welcomed to the cottage hearth with silent prayers.

“It was now placed beyond a doubt that the disease was one of mortal danger; yet David, surrounded again by his old cares, busied himself with many bright and delusive dreams of ultimate recovery. Pictures of a pleasant, dreamy convalescence in a foreign clime floated before him morn and night, and the fairest and dearest of the dreams was Italy. Previous to his departure for London he had concocted a wild scheme for visiting Florence, and throwing himself on the poetical sympathy of Robert Browning. He had even thought of enlisting in the English Garibaldian corps and by that means gaining his cherished wish. ‘How about Italy?’ he wrote to me after returning home. ‘Do you still entertain its delusive notions? Pour out your soul before me; I am as a child.’ All at once a new dream burst upon him. A local doctor insisted that the invalid should be removed to a milder climate, and recommended Natal. In a letter full of coaxing tenderness David besought me, for the sake of old days, to accompany him thither. I answered indecisively, but immediately made all endeavours to grant my friend’s wish. Meanwhile I received the following:—

“ ‘ MERKLAND, KIRKINTOLLOCK,

“ ‘ 10th November, 1860.

“ ‘ EVER DEAR BOB,—Your letter causes me some uneasiness ; not but that your objections are numerous and vital enough, but they convey the sad and firm intelligence that you cannot come with me. It is absolutely impossible for you to raise a sum sufficient ! Now you know it is not necessary that I should go to Natal ; nay, I have, in very fear, given up the thoughts of it ; but we, or I, could go to Italy or Jamaica—this latter, as I learn, being the more preferable. Nor has there been any “ crisis ” come, as you say. I would not cause you much trouble (forgive me for hinting this), but I believe we could be happy as in the dear old times. Doctor—(whose address I don’t know) supposes that I shall be able to work (?) when I reach a more genial climate ; and if that should prove the result, why, it is a consummation devoutly to be wished. But the matter of money bothers me. What I wrote to you was all hypothetical, *i.e.*, things have been carried so far, but I have not heard whether or no the subscription has been gone on with. And, supposing for one instant the utterly preposterous supposition that I had money to carry us both, then comes the second objection—your dear mother ! I am not so far gone, though I fear far enough, to ignore that blessed feeling. But if it were for your good ? Before God, if I thought it would in any way harm your health (that cannot be) or your hopes, I would never have mooted the proposal. On the contrary, I feel from my heart it would benefit you ; and how much would it not benefit *me* ? But I am baking without flour. The cash is not in my hand, and I fear never will be ; the amount I would require is not so easily gathered.

“‘Dobell¹ is again laid up. He is at the Isle of Wight, at some establishment called the Victoria Baths. I am told that his friends deem his life in constant danger. He asks for your address. I shall send it only to-day ; wait until you hear what he has got to say. He would prefer me to go to Brompton Hospital. *I would go anywhere for a change.* If I don't get money *somehow or somewhere* I shall die of *ennui*. A weary desire for change, life, excitement of every, *any* kind possesses me, and without *you* what am I? There is no other person in the world whom I could spend a week with and thoroughly enjoy it. Oh, how I desire to smoke a cigar and have a pint and a chat with you.

“‘By the way, how are you getting on? Have you lots to do? and well paid for it? Or is life a lottery with you? and the tea-caddy a vacuum? and a snare? and—a nightmare? Do you *dream* yet on your old rickety sofa in the dear old ghastly bankrupt garret at No. 66? Write to yours eternally, David Gray.’

“The proposal to go abroad was soon abandoned, partly because the invalid began to evince a nervous home-sickness, but chiefly because it was impossible to raise a sufficient sum of money. Yet be it never said that this youth was denied the extremest loving sympathy and care. As I look back upon those days it is to me a glad wonder that so many tender faces, many of them quite strange, clustered round his sick-bed. When it is reflected that he was known only as a poor Scotch lad, that even his extraordinary lyric faculty was as yet only half guessed; if guessed at all, the kindness of the world through his trouble is extra-

¹ “Sydney Dobell, author of ‘Balder,’ ‘The Roman,’ &c., whose kindness to David, whom he never saw, is beyond all praise.”

ordinary. Milnes, Dobell, Dobell's lady-friends at Hampstead, tired never in devising plans for the salvation of the poor consumptive invalid—goodness which sprang from the instincts of the heart itself, and not from that intellectual benevolence which invests in kind deeds with a view to a bonus from the Almighty.

“The best and tenderest of people, however, cannot always agree ; and in this case there was too much discussion and delay. Some recommended the long sea voyage ; one doctor recommended Brompton Hospital ; Milnes suggested Torquay in Devonshire. Meantime Gray, for the most part ignorant of the discussions that were taking place, besought his friends on all hands to come to his assistance. Late in November he addressed the editor of a local newspaper with whom he was personally acquainted and who had taken interest in his affair : ‘ I write you in a certain commotion of mind, and may speak wrongly. But I write to *you* because I know it will take much to offend you when no offence is meant ; and when the probable offence will proceed from youthful heat and frantic foolishness. It may be impertinent to address you, of whom I know so little, and yet so much ; but the severe circumstances *seem* to justify it.

“‘The medical verdict pronounced upon me is *certain and rapid death if I remain at Merkland*. That is awful enough, even to a brave man. But there is a chance of escape ; as a drowning man grasps at a straw I strive for it. Good, kind, true Dobell writes me this morning the plans for my welfare which he has put in progress and which most certainly meet my wishes. They are as follows : *Go immediately and as a guest* to the house of Doctor Lane in the salubrious town of Richmond ; thence, when the difficult matter of admission is over-

come, to the celebrated Brompton Hospital for chest diseases, and in the spring to Italy. Of course, all this presupposes the conjectural problem that I will slowly recover. "Consummation devoutly to be wished!" Now you think, or say, what prevents you from taking advantage of all these plans? At once, and without any squeamishness, *money for an outfit*. I did not like to ask Dobell, nor do I ask you; but, hearing a "subscription" had been *spoken of*, I urge it with all my weak force. I am not in want of an immense sum, but say £12 or £15. This would conduce to my safety as far as human means could do so. If you can aid me in getting this sum the obligation to a sinking fellow-creature will be as indelible in his heart as the moral law.

"I hope you will not misunderstand me. My barefaced request may be summed thus: If your influence set the affair a-going, quietly and *quickly*, the thing is done and I'm off. Surely I am worth £15, and for God's sake overlook the strangeness and the freedom and the utter impertinence of this communication. I would be off for Richmond in two days, had I the money, and sitting here thinking of the fearful probabilities makes me half-mad.'

"It was soon found necessary, however, to act with decision. A residence in Kirkintollock throughout the winter was, on all accounts, to be avoided. A lady therefore subscribed to the Brompton Hospital for chest complaints for the express purpose of procuring David admission.

"One bleak, wintry day, not long after the receipt of the above letter, I was gazing out of my lofty lodging-window when a startling vision presented itself, in the shape of David himself, seated, with quite a gay look, in an open Hansom cab. In a

minute we were side by side, and one of my first impulses was to rebuke David for the folly of exposing himself during such weather, in such a vehicle. This folly, however, was on a parallel with David's general habits of thought. Sometimes, indeed, the poor boy became unusually thoughtful, as when, during his illness, he wrote thus to me: 'Are you remembering that you will need clothes? These are things you take no concern about, and so you may be seedy without knowing it. By all means hoard a few pounds if you can (I require none) for any emergency like this. Brush your excellent top-coat; it is the best and warmest I ever had on my back. Mind, you have to pay ready-money for a new coat. A seedy man will not get on if he requires, like you, to call personally on his employers.'

"David had come to London in order to go either to Brompton or to Torquay—the hospital at which last-named place was thrown open to him by Mr. Milnes. Perceiving his dislike for the Temperance Hotel, to which he had been conducted, I consented that he should stay in the 'ghastly bankrupt garret' until he should depart to one or other of the hospitals. It was finally arranged that he should accept a temporary invitation to a hydropathic establishment at Sudbrook Park, Richmond. Thither I at once conveyed him. Meanwhile, his prospects were diligently canvassed by his numerous friends. His own feelings at this time were well expressed in a letter home: 'I am dreadfully afraid of Brompton; living among sallow, dolorous, dying consumptives is enough to kill me. Here I am as comfortable as can be: a fire in my room all day, plenty of meat and good society, nobody so ill as myself; but there, perhaps, hundreds far worse (the hospital holds 218

in all stages of the disease ; ninety of them died last report), dying beside me, perhaps—it frightens me.'

"About the same time he sent me the following, containing more particulars :—

" 'SUDBROOK PARK, RICHMOND,
" 'SURREY.

" 'MY DEAR BOB,—Your anxiety will be allayed by learning that I am little worse. The severe hours of this establishment have *not* killed me. At eight o'clock in the morning a man comes into my bedroom with a pail of cold water, and I must rise and get myself *soused*. This *sousing* takes place three times a day, and I'm not dead *yet*. To-day I told the bath-man that I was utterly unable to bear it, and refused to undress. The doctor will hear of it—that's the very thing I want. The society here is most pleasant. No patient so bad as myself. No wonder your father wished to go to the water cure for a month or two ; it is the most pleasant, refreshing thing in the world. But *I* am really too weak to bear it. Robert Chambers is here ; Mrs. Crowe the authoress ; Lord Brougham's son-in-law ; and at dinner and tea the literary tittle-tattle is the most wonderful you ever heard. They seem to know everything about everybody but Tennyson. Major — (who has a *beautiful* daughter here) was crowned with a laurel-wreath for some burlesque verses he had made and read last night. Of course you know what I am among them—a pale, cadaverous young person, who sits in dark corners, and is for the most part silent, with a horrible fear of being pounced upon by a cultivated unmarried lady, and talked to.

" 'Seriously, I am not better. When the novelty of my situation is gone, won't the old days at Oakfield

Terrace seem pleasant? Why didn't they last for ever?

“ ‘Yours ever,
“ ‘DAVID GRAY.’ ”

“All at once David began, with a delicacy peculiar to him, to consider himself an unwarrantable intruder at Sudbrook Park. In the face of all persuasion, therefore, he joined me in London, whence he shortly afterwards departed for Torquay.

“He left me in good spirits, full of pleasant anticipation of Devonshire scenery. But the second day after his departure he addressed to me a wild epistle, dated from one of the Torquay hotels. He had arrived safe and sound, he said, and had been kindly received by a friend of Mr. Milnes. He had at first been delighted with the town and everything in it. He had gone to the hospital, had been received by ‘a nurse of death’ (as he phrased it), and had been inducted into the privileges of the place; but on seeing his fellow-patients, some in the last stages of disease, he had fainted away. On coming to himself he obtained an interview with the matron. To his request for a private apartment, she had answered that to favour him in that way would be to break written rules, and that he must content himself with the common privileges of the establishment. On leaving the matron he had furtively stolen from the place and made his way through the night to the hotel. From the hotel he addressed the following terrible letter to his parents:—

“ ‘TORQUAY, *January 6, 1861.*

“ ‘DEAR PARENTS,—I am coming home—home-sick. I cannot stay from home any longer. What’s the

good of me being so far from home, and sick and ill? I don't know whether I'll be *able* to come back—sleeping none at night—crying out for my mother, and her so far away. O God! I wish I were home never to leave it more! Tell everybody that I'm coming back—no better—worse, worse. What's about climate—about frost or snow or cold weather when one is at home? I wish I had never left it.

“But how am I to get back without money, and my expenses for the journey newly paid yesterday? I came here yesterday scarcely able to walk. O how I wish I saw my father's face—shall I ever see it? I have no money, and I want to get home, home, home! What shall I do, O God? Father, I shall *steal* to see you again, because I did not use you rightly—my conduct to you all the time I was at home makes me miserable, miserable, miserable! Will you forgive me?—Do I ask that? Forgiven, Forgiven, Forgiven! If I can't get money to pay for my box, I shall leave box and everything behind. I shall try and be at home by Saturday, January 12th. Mind the day—if I am not home—God knows where I shall be. I have come through things that would make your hearts ache for me—things which I shall never tell to anybody but you, and you shall keep them secret as the grave. Get my own little room ready quick, quick; have it all tidy and clean and cosy against my home-coming. I wish to die there, and nobody shall nurse me except my own dear mother ever, ever again. O home, home, home!

“I will try and write again, but mind the day. Perhaps my father will come into Glasgow if I *can* tell him beforehand *how*, *when*, and *where* I shall be. I shall try all I can to let him know.

“ ‘Mind and tell everybody that I am coming back, and cannot stay away. Tell everybody; but I shall come back in the dark, because I am so utterly unhappy. No more, no more. Mind the day.

“ ‘Yours,

“ ‘D. G.

“ ‘Don’t answer—not even *think* of answering.’

“Before I had time to comprehend the state of affairs, there came a second letter stating that David was on the point of starting for London. ‘Every ring at the hotel bell makes me tremble, fancying they are coming to take me away by force. *Had you seen the nurse!* Oh that I were back again at home—Mother! mother! mother!’ A few hours after I had read these lines in miserable fear, arrived Gray himself, pale, anxious, and trembling. He flung himself into my arms with a smile of sad relief. ‘Thank God!’ he cried, ‘*that’s* over, and I am here!’ Then his cry was for home; he would die if he remained longer adrift; he must depart at once. I persuaded him to wait for a few days, and in the mean time saw some of his influential friends. The skill and regimen of a medical establishment being necessary to him at this stage, it was naturally concluded that he should go to Brompton; but David, in a high state of nervous excitement, scouted the idea. Disease had sapped the fountains of the once strong spirit. He was now bent on returning to the North, and wrote more calmly to his parents from my lodgings:—

“ ‘LONDON, *Thursday*.

“ ‘MY VERY DEAR PARENTS,—Having arrived in London last night my friends have seized on me

again and wish me to go to Brompton. But what I saw at Torquay was enough, and I will come home, though it should freeze me to death. You must not take literally what I wrote you in my last. I had just *run away* from Torquay Hospital, and didn't know what to do or where to go. But you see I have got to London, and surely by some means or other I shall get home. I am really home-sick. *They all tell me my life is not worth a farthing candle if I go to Scotland in this weather, but what about that.* I wish I could tell my father when to come to Glasgow, but I can't. *If I start to-morrow* I shall be in Glasgow very late, and what am I to do if I have no cash. If he comes into Glasgow by the twelve train on Saturday I may, if possible, see him at the train, but I would not like to say positively. Surely I'll get home somehow. I don't sleep any at night now for coughing and sweating. I am afraid to go to bed. Strongly hoping to be with you soon.

“Yours ever,

“DAVID GRAY.”

“‘Home—home—home!’ was his hourly cry. To resist these frantic appeals would have been to hasten the end of all. In the midst of winter I saw him into the train at Euston Square. A day afterwards David was in the bosom of his father's household, never more to pass thence alive. Not long after his arrival at home he repented his rash flight, ‘I am not at all contented with my position. I acted like a fool; but if the hospital were the *sine quâ non* again my conduct would be the same.’ Further, ‘I lament my own foolish conduct, but what was that quotation about *impellunt in Acheron*? It was all nervous impulsion. However, I despair not, and

least of all, my dear fellow, to those whom I have deserted wrongfully.'

"Ere long poor David made up his mind that he must die, and this feeling urged him to write something that would keep his memory green for ever. 'I am working away at my old poem, Bob; leavening it throughout with the pure, beautiful theology of Kingsley.' A little later: 'By the bye, I have about six hundred lines of my poem written, but the manual labour is so weakening that I do not go on.' Nor was this all. In the very shadow of the grave, he began and finished a series of sonnets on the subject of his own disease and impending death. This increased literary energy was not, as many people imagined, a sign of increased physical strength; it was merely the last flash upon the blackening brand. Gradually, but surely, life was ebbing away from the young poet.

"In March, 1861, I formed the plan of visiting Scotland in the spring, and wrote to David accordingly. His delight at the prospect of a fresh meeting—perhaps a farewell one—was as great as mine.

"*MERKLAND, March 12, 1861.*

"*'MY DEAR BOB,—I am very glad to be able to write you to-day. Rest assured to find a change in your old friend when you come down in April. And do, old fellow, let it be the end of April, when the evenings are cool and fresh, and these east-winds have howled themselves to rest. When I think of what a fair worshipful season is before you, I advise you to remove to a little room at Hampstead, where I only wish too, too much to be with you. Don't forget to come North since you have spoken about it; it has made me very happy. My health is no*

better—not having been out of my room since I wrote, and for some time before. The weather here is so bitterly cold and unfavourable that I have not walked a hundred yards for three weeks. I trust your revivifying presence will electrify my weary relaxed limbs and enervated system. The mind, you know, has a great effect on the body. Accept the wholesome commonplace. . . . By the way, how about Dobell? Did your mind of itself recognise, or even against itself recognise, through the clothes *a man—a poet*? Young speaks well:—

““I never bowed but to superior worth,
Nor ever failed in my allegiance there. . . .”

Has he the modesty and make-himself-at-home manner of Milnes?’

“The remainder of this letter is unfortunately lost.

“In April I saw him for the last time, and heard him speak words which showed the abandonment of hope. ‘I am dying,’ said David, leaning back in his armchair in the little carpeted bedroom; ‘I am dying, and I’ve only two things to regret: that my poem is not published and that I have not seen Italy.’ In the endeavour to inspire hope, I spoke of the happy past, and of the happy days yet to be. David only shook his head with a sad smile. ‘It is the old *dream*—only a dream, Bob—but I am content.’ He spoke of all his friends with tenderness, and of his parents with intense and touching love. Then it was ‘farewell.’ ‘After all our dreams of the future,’ he said, ‘I must leave you to fight alone; but shall there be no more “cakes and ale” because I die?’

“I returned to London; and ere long heard that David was eagerly attempting to get ‘The Luggie’

published. Delay after delay occurred. 'If my book be not immediately gone on with I fear I may never see it. Disease presses closely on me . . . the merit of my MSS. is very little—mere hints of better things—crude notions harshly languaged ; but that must be overlooked. They are left not to the world (wild thought !), but as the simple, possible, sad, only legacy I can leave to those who have loved and love me.' To a dear friend and fellow-poet, William Freeland, then sub-editor of the *Glasgow Citizen*, he wrote at this time, 'I feel more acutely the approach of that mystic dissolution of existence. The body is unable to perform its functions, and like rusty machinery creaks painfully to the final crash. . . . About my poem—it troubles me like an ever-present demon. Some day I'll burn all that I have ever written—yet no ! They are all that remain of *me* as a living soul. Milnes offers five pounds towards its publication. I shall have it ready by Saturday first.' And to Free-land, who visited him every week, and cheered his latter moments with a true poet's converse, he wrote out a wild dedication, ending in these words : 'Before I enter that nebulous, uncertain land of shadowy notions and tremulous wonderings—standing on the threshold of the sun and looking back, I cry thee, O beloved ! a last farewell, lingeringly, passionately, without tears.' At this period I received the following :—

“ ‘MERKLAND, N.B. *Sunday Evening.*

“ ‘DEAR, DEAR BOB,—By all means and instantly, “move in this matter” of my book. Do you really and without any dream work, think it could be gone about *immediately* ? If not soon I fear I shall never behold it. *The doctors give me no hope*, and with the yellowing of the leaf changes likewise the countenance of your

friend. Freeland is in possession of the MSS., but before I send them (I love them in so great temerity) I would like to see, and, if *at all possible*, revise them. Meanwhile, act and write. Above all, Bob, give me (and my father) no hope unless on sound foundation. Better that the rekindled desire should die than languish, bringing misery. I cannot sufficiently impress on you how important "this book" is to me: with what ignoble trembling I anticipate its appearance; how I shall bless you should you succeed.

"Do not tempt me with your kindness. The family have almost got over the strait, only my father being out of work. It is indeed a "golden treasury" you have sent me. Many thanks. My only want is new interesting books. I shall return it soon when I get *Smith*. Do not, like a good fellow, disappoint an old friend by forgetting to send *that* work. With what interest (thinking of my own probable volume) shall I examine the print, &c. *I am sure, sure to return it.*

"When *you* complain of physical discomfort I believe. What is the matter? Your letters now are a mere provoking adumbration of your condition. I know positively nothing of you, but that you are mentally, and bodily depressed, and that you will never forget Gray. In God's name let us keep together the short time remaining.

"You tell me nothing; write sooner too. Recollect I have no other pleasure. How is your mother? and all? Are your editorial duties oppressive? Is life full of hope and bright faith, *yet, yet*? Tell me, Bob, and tell me quickly.

"What a fair, sad, beautiful dream is *Italy*! Do you still entertain its delusive notions? Pour out your soul before me;—I am as a child.

"Yours for ever,

"DAVID GRAY."

Still later, in an even sweeter spirit, he wrote to an old schoolmate, Arthur Sutherland, with whom he had dreamed many a boyish dream, when they were pupil teachers together at the Normal school :—

“ ‘As my time narrows to a completion you grow dearer. I think of you daily with quiet tears. I think of the happy, happy days we might have spent together at Maryburgh ; but the vision darkens. My crown is laid in the dust for ever. Nameless too ! God, how that troubles me ! Had I but written one immortal poem, what a glorious consolation ! But this shall be my epitaph if I have a gravestone at all—

“ ‘ ‘ ‘Twas not a life,
 ‘Twas but a piece of childhood thrown away.”

O dear, dear Sutherland ! I wish I could spend two *healthy* months with you ; we would make an effort, and do something great. But slowly, insidiously, and I fear fatally, consumption is doing its work, until I shall be only a fair odorous memory (for I have great faith in your affection for me) to you—a sad tale for your old age.

“ ‘ ‘ ‘Whom the gods love, die young.”

Bless the ancient Greeks for that comfort. If I was not ripe do you think I would be gathered ? Work for fame for my sake, dear Sutherland. Who knows but in spiritual being I may send sweet dreams to you—to advise, comfort, and command ! who knows ? At all events, when I am *mooly*, may you be fresh as the dawn.

“ ‘Yours till death, and I trust *hereafter too*,
 “ ‘DAVID GRAY.’

"At last, chiefly through the agency of the unwearying Dobell, the poem was placed in the hands of the printer. On the 2nd of December, 1861, a specimen-page was sent to the author. David, with the shadow of death even then dark upon him, gazed long and lingeringly at the printed page. All the mysterious past—the boyish yearnings, the flash of anticipated fame, the black surroundings of the great city—flitted across his vision like a dream. It was 'good news,' he said. The next day the complete silence passed over the weaver's household, for David Gray was no more. Thus, on the 3rd of December, 1861, in the twenty-fourth year of his age, he passed tranquilly away, almost his last words being, 'God has love and I have faith.' The following epitaph, written out carefully a few months before his decease, was found among his papers :—

"MY EPITAPH.

"Below lies one whose name was traced in sand—
 He died, not knowing what it was to live :
 Died while the first sweet consciousness of manhood
 And maiden thought electrified his soul :
 Faint beatings in the calyx of the rose.
 Bewildered reader, pass without a sigh
 In a proud sorrow ! There is life with God,
 In other kingdom of a sweeter air ;
 In Eden every flower is blown. Amen.

"DAVID GRAY."

"September 27th, 1861." 1

"*You will never forget Gray!*" wrote the dying poet to his friend ; and surely his faith was justified, for David Gray owes his reputation as much to Robert Buchanan as to his own undoubted genius. At the time when Gray was living in Stamford Street, several

1 "David Gray and other Essays."

visitors went to see him—Lawrence Oliphant, Charles Mackay, besides the ever kindly Monckton Milnes—but of those visitors the youthful Robert Buchanan saw little or nothing, being too proud and independent to seek their patronage or friendship for himself. Whenever a visitor was announced he went away downstairs into the streets, not returning until his companion was again alone. Friends he himself had none, nor was he disposed to seek for them until he could meet them on equal terms. He sought no sympathy and he needed none, for he was strong and able to fight his own way. Nevertheless, he once or twice felt a little sore when some of the good people, whose sympathies Gray's illness had awakened, appeared to assume that he himself was an interloper in his own lodgings, a sort of hanger-on to his sick friend. He must have felt how infinitely his love and friendship transcended theirs. Except for *his* succour Gray would still have been adrift, without companionship, without a tender hand to minister to his wants, as Robert Buchanan did, by night and by day, until the morning when the two parted at the railway station at Euston Square, when Gray returned home to the little cottage at Merkland where he died.

But even with the death of his friend his responsibilities in this connection were not laid aside, for though he had his own way to make in the world, though part of his earnings had to go to his father (who was too old and broken to start life afresh), he yet found enough, by practising great self-denial, to enable him to extend a helping hand to the relatives of his dead friend.

"The book of poems written, and the writer laid quietly down in the auld aisle burying-ground, had

David Gray wholly done with earth? No; for he worked from the grave on one who loved him with a love transcending that of woman. In the weaver's cottage at Merkland subsisted tender sorrow and affectionate remembrance; but something more. The shadow lay in the cottage; a light had departed which would never again be seen on sea or land; and David Gray, the hand-loom weaver, the father of the poet, felt that the meaning had departed out of his simple life. There was a great mystery. The world called his darling son a poet—and he hardly knew what a poet was; all he *did* know was that the coming of this prodigy had given a new complexion to all the facts of existence. There was a dream-life, it appeared, beyond the work in the fields and the loom. His son, whom he had thought mad at first, was crowned and honoured for the very things which his parents had thought useless. Around him, vague, incomprehensible, floated a new atmosphere, which clever people called *poetry*, and he began to feel that it was beautiful—the more so, that it was so new and wondrous. The fountains of his nature were stirred. He sat and smoked before the fire o' nights, and found himself dreaming too! He was conscious now that the glory of his days was beyond that grave in the kirkyard. He was like one that walks in a mist, his eyes full of tears. But he said little of his griefs—little, that is to say, in the way of direct complaint. 'We feel very weary now David has gone!' was all the plaint I knew him to utter; he grieved so silently, wondered so speechlessly. The new life, brief and fatal, made him wise. With the eager sensitiveness of the poet himself he read the various criticisms on David's book; and so subtle was the change in him that, though he was utterly unlearned, and had

hitherto had no insight whatever into the nature of poetry, he knew by instinct whether the critics were right or wrong, and felt their suggestions to the very roots of his being.

“With this old man, in whom I recognised a greatness and sweetness of soul that has broadened my view of God’s humblest creatures ever since, I kept up a correspondence—at first for David’s sake—but latterly for my correspondent’s own sake. His letters, brief and simple as they were, grew fraught with delicate and delicious meaning ; I could see how he marvelled at the mysterious light he understood not, yet how fearlessly he kept his soul stirred towards the eternal silence where his son was lying. ‘We feel very weary now David has gone!’ Ah, how weary ! The long years of toil told their tale now ; the thread was snapped, and labour was no longer a perfect end to the soul and satisfaction to the body. The little carpeted bedroom was a prayer-place now. The Luggie flowing, the green woods, the thymy hills, had become haunted ; a voice unheard by other dwellers in the valley was calling, calling, and a hand was beckoning ; and tired, more tired, dazzled, more dazzled, grew the old weaver. The very *names* of familiar scenes were now a strange trouble ; for were not these names echoing in David’s songs ? Merkland, ‘the summer woods of dear Gartshire,’ the ‘fairy glen of Wooilee,’ Criftin, ‘with his host of gloomy pine-trees,’ all had their ghostly voices. Strange rhymes mingled with the humming of the loom. Mysterious ‘poetry,’ which he had once scorned as an idle thing, deepened and deepened in its fascination for him. All he saw and heard meant something strange in rhyme. He was drawn along by music, and he could not rest.

“Beside him dwelt the mother. Her face was quite calm. She had wept bitterly, but her heart was now with other sons and daughters. David was with God, and the minister said that God was good—that was quite enough. None of the new light had troubled her eyes. She knew that her beloved had made a ‘heap o’ rhyme’—that was all. A good loving lad had gone to rest, but there were still bairns left, bless God!

“But the old man lingered on, with hunger in his heart, wonder in his soul. This could not last for ever. In the winter of 1864 he warned me that he was growing ill; and although he attributed his illness to cold, his letters showed me the truth. There was some physical malady, but the aggravating cause was mental. It was my duty, however, to do all that could be done humanly to save him; and the first thing to do was to see that he had those comforts which sick men need. I placed his case before Lord Houghton; but generous as that man is, all men are not so generous. ‘It is exceedingly difficult to get people to assist a man of genius himself,’ wrote Lord Houghton gloomily; ‘they won’t assist his relations.’ Lord Houghton, however, personally assisted him, and was joined by a kind colleague, Mr. Baillie Cochrane.

“I felt then, and I feel now, that the condition of the old man was even more deeply affecting than the condition of David in his last moments, as deserving of sympathy, as universal in its appeal to human generosity; and I felt a yearning, moreover, to provide for the comfort of David’s mother, and for the education of David’s brothers. Who knew but that, among the latter, might be another bright intellect, which a little schooling might save for the world? After puzzling myself for a plan, I at last thought

that I could attain all my wishes by publishing a book to be entitled 'Memorials of David Gray,' and to contain contributions from all the writers of eminence whom I could enlist in the good cause. Such a thing would *sell*, and might, moreover, be worth buying. The fine natures were not slow in responding to the appeal, and I mention some names that they may gain honour. Tennyson promised a poem; Browning another; George Eliot agreed to contribute; Dickens, because he was too busy to write anything more, offered me an equivalent in money. All seemed well, when one or two objections were raised on the score of propriety; and it was even suggested that 'it looked like begging for the father on the strength of Gray's reputation.' Confused and perplexed, I determined to refer the matter to one whose good sense is as great as his heart, but (luckily for his friends) a great deal harder. 'Should I or should I not, under the circumstances, go on with my scheme?' His answer being in the negative, the book was not gone on with, and the matter dropped.

"Meantime the old man was getting worse. On the 27th of April I received this letter:—

"'MERKLAND.

"'DEAR MR. BUCHANAN,—We hope this will find you and Mrs. Buchanan in good health. I am not getting any better. The cough still continues. However, I rise every day a while, but it is only to sit by the fire. Weather is so cold I cannot go out except sometimes I get out and walks round yard. *I am not looking for betterness.* I have nothing particular to say, only we thought you would be thinking us ungrateful in not writing soon.

"'I remain, yours ever,

"'DAVID GRAY.'

"On the 9th of May he wrote, 'I have Dr. Stewart to attend me. He called on Sunday and sounded me—he says I am a dying man, and dying fast. You cannot imagine what a weak person I am ; I am nearly bedfast.' On the 16th of May came the last lines I ever received from him. They are almost illegible, and their purport prevents me from printing them here. A few days more, and the old man was dead. His green grave lies in the shadow of the obelisk which stands over his beloved son. Father and child are side by side. A little cloud, a pathetic mystery, came between them in life ; but that is all over. The old hand-loom weaver, who never wrote a verse, unconsciously reached his son's stature ere he passed away. The mysterious thing called 'poetry,' which operated such changes in his simple life, became all clear at last—in that final moment when the world's meanings become transparent, and nothing is left but to swoon back with closed eyes into the darkness, confiding in God's mercy, content either to waken at His footstool, or to rest painlessly for evermore."¹

Thus it will be seen that even at a period of his career when most young men are sowing their "wild oats" Robert Buchanan was dispensing that blessed charity for which he afterwards became so famous.

"He could hear of no case of poverty or suffering (wrote Mr. Henry Murray, who knew him intimately for years) and rest until he had relieved it, and for many years he was the milch-cow of every impecunious scribbler in London. His nationality must have cost him many scores of pounds per annum, because, at all times open to the moving influence of a tale of woe, he would always reward

¹ "David Gray and other Essays."

with a double gratuity any such tale that was told with a Scotch accent. The actor who had fallen on evil times dined sumptuously on the day he met Buchanan. Often laughing at himself for being the dupe of people he knew to be morally unworthy, he never knotted his purse-strings for such a reason. It was enough that the applicant was poor. He had little faith in 'organised' charity, and detested the self-advertisement of the published subscription list. He felt that charity was hardly charity at all unless the alms could pass from hand to hand, accompanied by a word of hopeful cheer which doubled the value of the gift." ¹

¹ "Robert Buchanan and other Essays."

CHAPTER VIII

FRIENDSHIPS, 1864

WITH the death of David Gray his loneliness in the Great City became complete; almost his only acquaintances being Hepworth Dixon of the *Athenæum*, and other editors for whom he did a little work. His only recreation was the playhouse, and it was one night as he sat in the gallery of the Strand Theatre that he recognised on the stage the face of a player whom he had known slightly during his boyhood in Glasgow. His delight at the recognition was great. He hung round the stage door after the performance, waiting for the "extras" to come out, and when the one he sought emerged he eagerly reminded him of their acquaintance. The name of this actor was Edwin Danvers, famous shortly afterwards for his extraordinary performances in Byron's burlesques. At that time Mr. Danvers was not much better off than the boy who had so providentially found him (for the salaries received by actors then were very different to those of the present day), and he had, moreover, a wife and a large family to support, but poor as he was he had the kindly heart and warm hand of a true Bohemian, and he gave his youthful friend a Bohemian's welcome.

They adjourned together to a neighbouring bar, and there drank and spoke of old times till late into the night, and when they parted, with an arrangement to meet speedily again, the boy walked home across the Bridge of Sighs with a lighter heart. At last he had discovered some one whom he *knew*, some one to whom he could speak of the things he loved — of Scotland, of old friends there, of the wild life among the players, some one who was a fellow-fighter for bread, impecunious yet cheerful, like himself. Of course the pair had little or nothing in common, for Mr. Danvers was not in any sense of the word “literary,” and he had little or no interest in the art which the youth so passionately loved, but he was frank and free, and perhaps this companionship did more for the poet at that crisis of his career than a more solemn or more learned acquaintance could have done.

For several Sundays following this first meeting he went by invitation to join the Danvers family at their midday meal, but after a time the two drifted apart, yet the memory of this little gleam of friendship, coming as it did at a time when it meant so much to him, was never erased from his mind. Many years later the two heard of each other again, and now it was the poet who held forth a succouring hand, while the poor old actor, who had fallen upon evil days, had every reason to bless the name of Robert Buchanan.

The life he led in those days was not altogether that of a serious student. True he worked very hard by day and far into the night, but whenever he had a little money to spare he spent it in the simple dissipations of the Great City. Sometimes, in company with Mr. Danvers or some other “poor player,” he would

sail down the river and dance by moonlight in Rosher-ville Gardens. Curiously enough, the pleasantest thing that remained with him was the memory of those little Sunday dinners in Gerrard Street, Soho, where Mr. Danvers welcomed him to take "pot luck" with his wife and family, and where the joint cooked at the neighbouring baker's formed the centre of attraction.

A few years before his death he had rooms in Gerrard Street, and he took me to the window and pointed out the house where Mr. Danvers had lived and where those Sunday dinners had been eaten. "Ah, those days!" he said, with a sigh. "The merry days when I was young! I shall never again feast so royally or dream so happily as I did then!"

Meantime, he knew one or two houses where he was kindly entertained. One of these was the house of Westland Marston, near Primrose Hill. There he encountered sundry Bohemian journalists and players—Hermann Vezin, Adelaide Neilson, W. G. Wills, and many others. Westland Marston was an earnest and very able man who had written one or two successful dramas, the best known of these being the "Patrician's Daughter," but whose intellectual standards were somewhat old fashioned, either for original creations or great immediate popularity. His wife was very kind to all the young aspirants who frequented her house, and his eldest daughter Nellie interested the poet exceedingly. It seems to have been a curious household. Nearly all the members kept late hours, and did at midnight the work which ought to have been done by day. Mrs. Marston was an ardent spiritualist, and on one occasion the subject of these memoirs was present when she consulted the spirits about the eyes of her

little son Philip, who was even then almost totally blind. It was at the house of Westland Marston that Robert Buchanan met Dinah Muloch, the authoress of "John Halifax, Gentleman." She was some years his senior, and they had no sooner met than she carried him off to her little cottage on the verge of Hampstead Heath, and placed her small library at his command. "You will be a great man," she wrote to him, and he was very proud of the compliment. His old friend Hermann Vezin deserves more than a passing mention in these pages, for he is one of the kindest of men, earnest, scholarly, and sympathetic beyond measure to all young strugglers. He it was who "discovered" James Albery and also W. G. Wills, who for a long time had had a terrible fight with fortune. For Mr. Vezin's genius as an actor the poet had then, as always, the profoundest admiration. "No greater piece of acting," I have heard him say, "has been done within my memory than Vezin's 'Man o' Airlie.'" The "Man o' Airlie" was the hero of a play by W. G. Wills, it was founded on some German play and had for its theme the life and death of the poet Burns. My sister, too, was always a warm admirer of Hermann Vezin, and though she differed from her husband on a good many points, she was always at one with him when he spoke with such enthusiasm of the genius of his friend.

But despite such acquaintances as those which I have mentioned he was still, to use a homely expression, "like a fish out of water." "Many of the men and women whom I met were amusing enough" (he wrote), "but I speedily perceived that literature, instead of widening their ideas and enlarging their views, narrowed both hopelessly.

Wherever I went I heard tittle-tattle, not conversation—tittle-tattle about books and journals, good and bad notices, and views of what Carlyle called ‘able editors.’ I remembered with regret nobler talk to which I had listened in my boyhood at my father’s table. Many of the individuals I met seemed to me not only ill read and ignorant, but radically unintelligent, and I searched in vain for some young man of my own age with whom I could cultivate a friendship.”

Then it was that he made the acquaintance of Charles Gibbon, who was a year or so younger than himself. The pair first met at Herne Bay, whither they had gone for a few days’ recreation, and on their return to London they set up house-keeping together, Gibbon going to share the “bankrupt garret” in Stamford Street. Besides assisting his friend in the production of copy for Mr. Maxwell, Mr. Gibbon wrote a good deal of fiction on his own account. Although their earnings at that time were not great they were both at work far into the watches of the night, reading, writing, studying, like young fellows cramming for an examination. Every night a pot of strong coffee was set upon the hob, and out of this pot they refreshed themselves, fighting hard against the natural desire for sleep, and again and again tumbling off into a troubled doze till daylight came and they crept wearily to bed. There was no absolute necessity for their burning the midnight oil in this fashion, and indeed the poet never contracted this ugly habit until Mr. Gibbon became his companion. When the poet had a few shillings to spare they were now spent in books, for he was essaying a double task: to earn a living by his pen, and to complete his interrupted

education. In those vigils he learned his Horace and his Catullus almost by heart, and beginning to study German, soon mastered Goethe's "Faust" from the first page of the first, to the last page of the second part.

"It was about this time that I seriously thought for the first time in my life of winning instant and certain immortality by *killing a publisher!* I had been contributing articles and verses to divers magazines, including *Temple Bar* and the *St. James's Magazine*, then under the ownership of Mr. John Maxwell, and in the natural course of things I soon became acquainted with that gentleman—indeed, he sent for me, and made me certain overtures with regard to my contributions. He was a big, burly, florid-faced, loud-spoken Irishman, far from unkindly by disposition, and I am now quite sure, on reviewing my connection with him, that he was of no little service to me in my hard struggle for bread; indeed, he believed in me when few other people did, and but for him my sufferings in those days would certainly have been acuter. It became my custom to take him from time to time a bundle of manuscript, the length of which he would estimate without reading, and for which he would pay me a given sum, 'on the nail.' But his manners had not that repose which distinguishes the cast of Vere de Vere, and as I was very young and proud, I sometimes felt acutely and resented bitterly the style in which he occasionally received me. I was, no doubt, a trying young person, full of my own importance, but Maxwell, on the other hand, had a knack of rubbing my vanity the wrong way, and of making me feel myself, as I literally was, a pauper. Add to this, that I was often kept waiting for hours on the

premises in Fleet Street, and that I had sometimes to go away angry and disgusted, without an interview at all ; now and then, moreover, the great man was crusty, and wouldn't buy what I wanted to sell, so that I had to depart in despair. Well, for some reason or other, rightly or wrongly, I conceived the idea that Maxwell had used me very badly. I had called once or twice and failed to see him, and the style in which the Publisher's myrmidons received me deepened in me a sultry sense of wrong. So one morning, after several hungry days, I packed up a parcel of manuscript, procured a thick cudgel, and left my lodging with this intimation to my companion in wretchedness, the late Charles Gibbon : ' I am going to see Maxwell—I *will* see him, and if he is offensive as usual, I will beat out what brains the ruffian possesses and offer him up as a sacrifice to the Muses.' My friend laughed and thought I was joking, but I was really in earnest, and contemplated assault and battery. Off I strode, cudgel in hand, on this truly Christian errand. I cannot tell how it came about, but on entering the Publisher's shop and asking for its master, I was received with effusion, shown up at once into the presence and—well, then and there in the friendliest manner imaginable, Mr. Maxwell bought my manuscript and handed me his little cheque !

"Many a time since then I have laughed over this episode, wondering what would have happened if I had proceeded to extremities. I daresay I might have come off worse, for Maxwell was a powerful man and the weights were tremendously in his favour. But if I *had* assaulted him successfully, how all my future life would have been changed ! I might even have been hanged for killing a Publisher and gone

to the gallows with a flower in my buttonhole, sure of the worship of future generations of impecunious authors !

"Seriously I had no real *casus belli*, for, I repeat, Maxwell had been very kind to me. He was, I am certain, a thoroughly good fellow, while I, no doubt, was an aggressive young imp. Moreover, he never knew how hard my struggle was, and how dangerously near I sometimes was to starvation. A little after this period he gave me the editorship of one of his publications, the moribund *Welcome Guest*, and it was while I was editing this publication that he sent to me the lady whom he afterwards married, Miss M. E. Braddon. I ran her first story through the *Guest* and about the same time reviewed in the *Athenæum*, at Maxwell's request, her first and only volume of verse. I remember our first interview on the ground floor of the house where I lived in Stamford Street, Blackfriars. She was a plump, fair-haired unassuming young girl, while I was a curly-headed, diffident boy, and she must have been amused, I fancy, by my assumption of editorial airs. I trust that I have not conveyed the impression that my first publisher was either ungenerous or inconsiderate. He had no doubt his faults, but he was after all a very different person from some others whom I afterwards encountered. One of these had a playful way of insulting his authors, particularly when they came to him for money which they had earned. It was this gentleman, I am told, who said of me, *apropos* of a call I had made upon him : 'I can't stand that young fellow—he came into my office and he talked to me as if he was God Almighty, or *Lord Byron* !'"¹

By this time his father and mother had come to

¹ "Latter Day Leaves."

London and were living in lodgings in the neighbourhood of the Euston Road. His father found some work on the newspapers, and was also trying his hand at the manufacture of cheap fiction. Nothing seemed to daunt him, yet already the weight of trouble was beginning to bow him down, and he had grown quite grey. Mrs. Buchanan, who was some years his junior, had still the bloom of her early womanhood upon her. She had but one thought in life, the welfare of her son, and when that son presented a happy face to her she was happy too.

Y In course of time Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan took a small house in Kentish Town, and scraped together some fragments of furniture to make it habitable. It was a very small house, but it sufficed for their simple needs, and once settled in it Mrs. Buchanan implored her son to come and reside with her. He could not resist the appeal, so he moved to Kentish Town, his companion Charles Gibbon accompanying him, and the two lived together for some time under his father's roof.

At this period he turned his attention to the stage, and was soon busily engaged upon a poetical drama in four acts entitled "The Witch-finder." The scene of this play was laid in New England, at the period of the memorable State persecutions for witchcraft, and the leading character was an inspired bigot, who became instrumental, after destroying many helpless women, in procuring the condemnation of his own daughter. The dialogue was in blank verse, with the exception of certain comic scenes, which were written in a sort of Shakespearean prose. Such literary strength as he possessed at the time was put into this somewhat ambitious play and the result was not altogether

undramatic. He sent this drama to Fechter, then in management at the Lyceum, who informed him that it was a fine work, but so sad and dismal that it oppressed him like an evil dream. He then offered it to Phelps, who was quite enthusiastic over it, but for one reason or another hesitated to produce it. While the fate of the "Witchfinder" was still undecided, its author collaborated with Charles Gibbon on a dramatisation of Banim's powerful story "Crohoore of the Billhook." This piece, a lurid melodrama, was offered to Richard Edgar, then managing the Standard Theatre in Shoreditch and Sadler's Wells in Islington, and was at once accepted and paid for, the purchase money being the munificent sum of twenty pounds!

The "Rathboys," as the dramatisation was called, was produced in due course at the Standard Theatre, and ran successfully for some weeks. The leading character was played by Edmund Phelps, the son of the famous tragedian, and the "comic Irishman," by Thomas Thorne, with whom one of the authors was to have delightful business relations many years later. Before the play was withdrawn from representation the authors appeared in it themselves, Mr. Gibbon taking the part of a young lover, and Mr. Buchanan that of the hero, called Shadrack the Shingawn. As they knew the play by heart they had no rehearsals. The part played by Mr. Buchanan was that of a hunchback falsely accused of murder, and he made the character so hideously disfigured a monster that somebody inquired whether he was representing Shakespeare's Caliban. However, the audiences out eastward were not critical, and the performance passed off with a certain measure of applause. The crux of the performance came in the

penultimate act, when Shadrack had to rescue the heroine from a violent death, descending by a rope from the top of a precipice, seizing the heroine in his arms as she swung over the abyss from the branch of a tree, and ascending with her to the cliffs above. For this effect, which demanded an athlete rather than an actor, there had, as I have said, been no rehearsal, and it is more than probable that the aspiring actor showed some little doubt and trepidation, for the lady whom he was to save was in agonies of terror. However, all went well. Shadrack descended by a rope from the flies, clasped the lady in his arms, and was drawn back amid round after round of deafening applause.

In a kindly notice of Mr. Buchanan, written just after his death (1901), and published in *M. A. P.*, Mr. T. P. O'Connor said: "In his reminiscences I do not find any mention of one stage in Buchanan's life which was very interesting. He was employed as a small actor, if I mistake not, at the Britannia, or some other of the popular suburban theatres, and I think I have heard that his somewhat bulky form was one night precipitated from the rope on which, as Myles-na-Coppaleen in Boucicault's play, he was crossing the Lake of Killarney."

The episode which I have related is doubtless the one referred to, only it has got altered in the telling. Anyhow, Mr. Buchanan was never a salaried actor, and he never, to my knowledge, played the part of Myles-na-Coppaleen. Encouraged by the success of the "Rathboys," Mr. Edgar arranged for the production of the poetical play, the "Witchfinder," at Sadler's Wells, and it met with an excellent reception. The leading male part, Matthew Holt, was played by the late George Melville, while the late Miss Mariot

personated a mad youth, one Elijah Holt, whose brain had been turned by the denunciation of his mother by himself, and by her subsequent execution for witchcraft. The other characters were well sustained, and the piece had a fair local run, but it was the last attempt made by the poet for many years to conquer a foothold on the stage. After the "Witchfinder" had had its run, he turned aside from the theatre, and for some time devoted himself to literature pure and simple.

CHAPTER IX

MARRIAGE, 1861

IT was towards the close of the year 1861 that he married my sister, who was not yet out of her teens, and who was afterwards known among his friends as "Buchanan's lovely wife." "She was" (wrote Mr. O'Connor in *M. A. P.*) "a very beautiful woman, stately and statuesque in figure, with beautifully chiselled, regular features, fine eyes, and a gay and almost bubbling spirit. But early in her married life she was attacked by one of those painful internal maladies which are the death of health and domestic happiness, and often she suffered tortures. Indeed, I remember seeing her once laughing and chattering like some bright singing bird, and in the midst of it a shade suddenly fell upon her face, and turning to me she said: 'If you speak to me, I shall have to burst into tears.' I was young in years and even younger in experience, and knew nothing at that time of that strange world of laughter and tears, of heroic suffering and tragic depression, which is the world of the invalid woman, but the moment remained with me afterwards, an illuminating glimpse into the unfathomable depths of secret and silent sorrow and pain in which we move unconsciously among our fellow men and women."



MARY BUCHANAN.
(The Poet's Wife.)

At one period of her life Mr. O'Connor knew her extremely well, and she on her side always entertained a very warm feeling of friendship for him, but his knowledge of her did not begin till many years after her marriage, and in writing the above he is speaking of a time when her beauty would of necessity have become dimmed by a foreshadowing of the terrible anguish through which she was destined to pass.

Shortly after his marriage Mr. Buchanan went to Denmark. "Being one of the very few Englishmen of that day who knew the Danish language, he went to Schleswig-Holstein towards the end of the war as correspondent of the *Morning Star*. It was on his return from thence that he wrote so freely on Scandinavian literature, an unknown world to the bookmen of that day."¹ He was accompanied on this expedition by his father (who also, I should imagine, went in some official capacity), and during the absence of the pair the young wife went to stay with her mother-in-law, who at that time was living in the neighbourhood of Shepherd's Bush. It was during that visit to Denmark that he met Hans Christian Andersen ; he also visited the famous Thorwaldsen Museum, and was so much impressed by the figures of Christ and the Apostles, that he purchased the one of Christ and brought it home as a present to his wife. For a further record of those days I must give his own words.

"I did some occasional work for *All the Year Round*, and received for it a more liberal remuneration. These desultory contributions would hardly have served to keep me in bread and butter, had they not been supplemented by a leader on current

¹ *Pearson's Weekly*.

politics sent weekly to a newspaper in Ayr. One literary engagement, however, soon led to another ; and I was in high spirits indeed on the morning I received a letter from Edmund Yates informing me that he was subediting, under Sala, a new magazine to be called *Temple Bar*, and that Dickens had given him my name, among others, as that of a useful contributor. "Let me have your copy as soon as possible," Yates concluded, without even a suggestion that it might be disapproved. Shortly afterwards, when *Temple Bar* started, I became a constant contributor, and the pay, compared to what I had hitherto received, was princely.

"In after years, when he fell foul of me for an article from my pen, called the 'Newest Thing in Journalism,'¹ poor Yates asserted that his first knowledge of me was when 'I went to him with a letter of introduction from John Hollingshead.' This was a mistake, though it is quite true that I *did* have such a letter in my possession, and that I possibly presented it afterwards ; it had been procured for me from Hollingshead, whom I did not then know, by Sydney Dobell. It was not until I was an accepted contributor to *Temple Bar* that I met Yates in his rooms at the General Post Office, where he was a sort of under-secretary. He was a bright, cheery, somewhat loud-spoken young man, who had drifted into journalism *viâ* Thackeray and the Garrick Club, and he might be described as a very favourable specimen of the *littérateur* who was not essentially, or by temperament and education, literary. He wrote gossips for the journals—chatty, personal gossip of a kind not then so familiar as it is nowadays ; and in the course of his lightsome work he had written with unpleasant

¹ Published in the *Contemporary Review*.

personality of Thackeray's nose. Thackeray protested that Yates, a fellow-member of the Garrick Club, had broken the code of honour among gentlemen by utilising his knowledge as a club-man to insult him, Thackeray, and as a result, in spite of a strong remonstrance from Dickens, Yates was expelled. It was an unpleasant business, very contemptible and very trivial. I am quite certain that Yates erred out of sheer *gaieté de cœur*, and not from malice; indeed, his respect for the great novelist was almost idolatrous. Afterwards, when I visited him at his house in St. John's Wood, I found a large portrait of Thackeray hanging over his study table. He told me the whole story over whiskey and water, and the tears rolled down his manly cheeks as he did so, avowing both his sorrow and his adoration.

"All this time, while working diligently to make the pot boil, I was studying hard and writing verses to please myself. I had a few friends, the brightest and happiest influence upon me was that of Thomas Love Peacock, the friend of Shelley, and the kindest and most wise of scholars. He was living at Lower Halliford, on the Thames, and in order to be near him I took lodgings at Chertsey, only sleeping occasionally under his hospitable roof. It was rest and inspiration indeed to pass from the roar of Grub Street and the strident Sixties into the peaceful atmosphere of the brave old pagan's dwelling, to drink May Rosewell's cowslip wine, and to boat on the quiet river with Clari Leigh Hunt, a bright-eyed little maid of fifteen and Peacock's special pet. It was under Peacock's influence that I wrote many of my pseudo-classic poems, afterwards gathered together in my first volume, 'Undertones.'"¹

¹ *M. A. P.* ("In the Days of my Youth").

Another friend of those early days was the late Mr. William Black,¹ now so well and widely known as a writer of fiction. The two saw a good deal of each other at one time, but afterwards, through some misunderstanding, he and the poet drifted apart. His sister, Mrs. J. G. Morten, whom he described in his novels as "Queen Titania," was ever our warm friend, as also his niece, Miss Honnor Morten, who is known far and wide as an authority on hospital nursing and charitable works in general.

¹ Mr. Black died at Brighton in 1898, and was buried at Rottingdean.

CHAPTER X

G. H. LEWES AND ROBERT BROWNING, 1862

A VERY powerful influence was that of the late G. H. Lewes, whose name, coupled with that of the lady so well and widely known as "George Eliot," appears very frequently both in the published work and private letters of Mr. Buchanan.

"At the time when my friend and companion David Gray was in busy correspondence with Sydney Dobell, I was first opening up communication with George Henry Lewes. Lewes was well known to me as a man of letters and a powerful critic, as well as the friend and adviser of 'George Eliot;' and I was attracted to him by a certain catholicity or liberality of temper which animated those of his works with which I was familiar. About that time I had completed, in addition to divers poems in the classical manner, a number of blank verse idyls or pastorals, in which I had utilised to some extent my knowledge of Nature, and which, though crude enough, were certainly attempts in a praiseworthy direction. Altogether undecided as to the value of my attempts, and anxious to secure an authoritative opinion, I one day despatched to Lewes a formidable parcel, consisting of all sorts of poems, and accompanied with a letter, in which I requested him to tell me honestly if, in his opinion, I was a Poet. The reply came very speedily, in a long

and kindly letter which began by putting my pseudo-classical efforts as comparatively unimportant, and then proceeded as follows: 'But in the pastorals I recognised a different talent, and perhaps a future poet. I say "perhaps" because I do not know your age, and because there are so many poetical blossoms which never come to fruit; but these poems are original, or, at any rate, individual. If you would keep them by you for a time, strengthening the weak lines, as Tennyson elaborately does, I have no doubt that the best sort of success would attend them. If my advice is of any value, however, write as much as you feel impelled to write at present, but publish nothing. If you publish now you will get classed. The public will come to know you as a clever verse-writer, and will be slow, very slow, to believe anything else, whatever you may have become.' He ended by conjuring me to wait, at any rate some years, before thinking of publication."¹

Some years later, when the boy had become a man and had settled down in London, he wrote to Mr. Lewes to remind him of their correspondence. The answer to this letter was cordial in the extreme, and Mr. Lewes begged that his youthful friend would present himself at the Priory, North Bank, Regent's Park, where he was then living. It was an invitation of which he was not slow to avail himself; and thus the two met for the first time. "Remembering Douglas Jerrold's description of him, I was agreeably surprised to meet a little, bright, not ill-looking man of between forty and fifty, with a magnificent forehead, bright, intelligent eyes, and a manner full of intellectual grace. True, he was not physically beautiful. The great defects of the face were the coarse, almost

¹ "Latter Day Leaves."

sensual-looking mouth, with its protruding teeth, partly covered by a bristly moustache, and the small, retreating chin ; but when the face lighted up and the eyes sparkled and the mouth began its eloquent discourse, every imperfection was forgotten.

"Lunching one day at the Priory, *tête-à-tête* with 'George Eliot' and Lewes, I told them, among other stories of my youthful experience, the story of David Gray—his wild, dreamy youth, his strange ambition, his early death. Both of my hearers were deeply moved, and Lewes, with tears in his eyes, exclaimed when I had finished, 'Tell that story to the public too! Tell it as simply and vividly as you have told it to us this morning, and let Smith and Elder publish it in their magazine.' Upon this hint I wrote my little memoir, which was eagerly accepted for publication in the *Cornhill*, then under the editorship of Frederick Greenwood. About this time I was busily engaged in writing, or rather completing, a series of Scotch stories in verse, afterwards published under the title of 'Idyls and Legends of Inverburn.' Not without trepidation I showed one of the poems, 'Willie Baird,' to Lewes, and, to my great delight, he praised it enthusiastically. 'Publish a volume of such stories,' he said, 'and your fortune is made.' I then sent him the long narrative poem called 'Two Babes.' 'Better and better,' he wrote immediately upon reading it. Not content with empty praise, he communicated with Mr. George Smith, of Smith and Elder, and urged him to secure the work without delay."¹

Though his relations with Mr. Lewes seem to have been of a very friendly character, he was evidently not so well disposed towards the lady of the house.

¹ "Latter Day Leaves."

He hated anything like pretence or affectation, and the airs of mysterious greatness which George Eliot thought fit to assume were particularly repugnant to him.

"She posed behind a curtain, and Lewes acted as showman. No one could approach the oracle save with reverence, fear, and bated breath. If she was 'composing' she must not be disturbed; if she descended from the tripod, it was a godlike condescension; if she deigned, in that deep voice of hers, to make a remark about the weather, it was celestial thunder; if she joked, which she did 'wi' difficulty,' as we say in Scotland, her joke was summer lightning on Minerva's brow. This state of affairs was complicated by the fact of her peculiar relationship to Lewes. She had few female acquaintances, and those only worshippers, and her attitude towards the outside world, while sternly contemptuous, was at the same time morbidly uneasy.

"I am obliged to confess that my attitude towards the Sybil, when I was introduced to her by Lewes, was always somewhat irreverent. I was an impudent youngster, but I hated absolutism in any form. Towards any godhead which I really worshipped—towards Dickens, for example—I could have abased myself in the dust. But it unluckily happened that the works of George Eliot had never stirred me very deeply, and that I was rather amused than awed by her personality. Of course I kept my heterodoxy to myself as much as possible, but I am afraid that it oozed through my otherwise respectful manner, and at times I frankly suggested that not even great Genius had any right to assume airs of superiority towards broad Humanity. With Lewes himself, moreover, I had to be very careful; he was very

kind to me, but as the price of his sympathy he demanded a certain acquiescence which I could not always give, and my impudence more than once provoked him into angry remonstrance. Once, indeed, when I asserted myself a little too strongly, he threatened that if I did not behave myself he would give me the cold shoulder, to which my reply was, I fear, 'Give me the cold shoulder, and be hanged.'

"The last time I met Lewes was shortly after I published my diatribe on the 'Fleshly School of Poetry,' and when I was being shot at from all the countless batteries of coterie criticism. He was walking in Regent's Park, not far from Clarence Gate, and George Eliot, now Mrs. Lewes, was with him. Both looked worn and old. The Sybil wore a black silk skirt over a crinoline, an old-fashioned bonnet and mantle; she stooped very much, and looked quite an aged woman. I stopped and spoke to them for a few moments, and then the Sybil walked on while I still held Lewes by the hand. He said very little, but his manner was so cold and peculiar, that at last I released him and let him go. That night I wrote to him and asked if I had offended him in any way. He sent me a long, rambling letter in reply, from which I vaguely gathered that he thought I had done something very dreadful, showing (he said) an indifference to the rights of others of which he should not have thought me capable. He alluded, no doubt, to my article in the *Contemporary Review*, and to the subsequent pamphlet, but beyond that allusion I knew lay the knowledge that I had written somewhat coldly of George Eliot's poetry. I was not much surprised, for I knew that Lewes had many close friends among the pre-Raphaelite critics, but I

was so angry with his attitude towards me that I sent him an angry reply. I saw him once or twice afterwards, but we never came face to face again.

"It was at Lewes's house that I first met Robert Browning, whom I had long regarded with idolatry. I had heard he was in London, and had begged George Eliot to introduce me to him if possible, and the opportunity came at a little gathering to which both he and I were invited. It was shortly after the publication in the *Cornhill Magazine* of my memorials of David Gray, in the course of which I mentioned that my friend, in one of his wild moods, had thought of 'going to Italy,' and 'throwing himself on the sympathy of Robert Browning.' I found to my delight that Browning had been much pleased and interested by this allusion, and in the course of our first conversation he assured me that he would have given the poor boy a kindly welcome.

"We had a long and pleasant talk together, and after we had shaken hands with an arrangement to meet again, George Eliot took me aside, and said, smiling, 'Well, are you disappointed? Does he realise your expectations?' My reply was candour itself. I said that I *was* disappointed, though heaven knows what I had expected! I was little more than a boy, very full of Quixotic fancies, and very ignorant of the world, and perhaps I expected to find in the poet, whom I so greatly admired and revered, a less commonplace and more romantic personality. According to Lewes, with whom I afterwards discussed my new acquaintance, Browning was morbidly sensitive to criticism, and eager for any kind of praise; indeed Leigh Hunt had said, Lewes assured me, that Browning was so hungry for general approval, that he 'coveted that even of his own

washerwoman!’ There can be no doubt whatever that the poet was somewhat disheartened by his continuous failure to reach the great public, and by the contemptuous treatment generally accorded him by the newspaper critics. He had just published ‘*Dramatis Personæ*,’ and I had reviewed it at considerable length, with boyish ardour and enthusiasm, in a monthly magazine. It was the remembrance of this earliest enthusiasm that caused Browning to describe me, in answer to the statement that I had no appreciation of my own contemporaries, as ‘the kindest critic *he* had ever had!’

“Our relations though friendly were never those of unreserved intimacy. I was many years his junior, and had been reared in a rougher school; I had neither his dilettante tastes nor his dilettante omniscience. My attitude towards him, moreover, was that of a pupil to a teacher, to one whose intellectual position was assured, while mine was, to say the best of it, uncertain. But for this very reason I was prepared to recognise the moral greatness in him, and even to exaggerate the signs of a superior wisdom. I realised, however, very reluctantly, that, apart from his books, which were still a priceless treasure to me, he had little or no intellectual stimulus to give me. Many of his opinions seemed narrow, some of them even childish. They seemed to me essentially the opinions of a man in good society, less concerned with the great movements of Humanity than with the fleeting artistic phenomena of the hour. On some of the great subjects which concern our happiness as conditioned beings, he scarcely seemed to have thought at all.

“I was greatly struck by this fact, just before the publication of his poem ‘*La Saisiaz*.’ He had

returned from an excursion to Switzerland in company with his sister Sarah Ann and a lady to whom he was much attached—Miss Egerton Smith, proprietress of the *Liverpool Mercury*. One morning just as they were preparing for a mountain excursion, Miss Smith had died suddenly and painlessly, without any previous warning whatever of indisposition. Well, he came to my rooms in Gloucester Place, Regent's Park, and we had scarcely shaken hands before he began volubly to tell me of what had occurred, and to express his natural amazement and sorrow at the catastrophe. His feelings appeared to me those of simple horror, or, if I may use the word without any suggestion of personal timidity, of terror. 'If such things can be,' he cried, 'there is nothing safe in life whatever. At any moment we may be struck down suddenly and swept away!' I wondered, remembering many of the beautiful things he had written on the subject of death, and quoted to him, I remember, certain lines of verse without telling him that they were my own:—

“‘We mortals are as men on ships at sea,
And oft forget how *thin a plank divides*
Our lives from the abyss in which we sail.’

But this particular occurrence, he suggested, was so extraordinary, so unanticipated—he had been familiar with Death before, but it had always approached with some kind of *warning*, and he proceeded to describe in detail, as he afterwards described in his poem, the piteous circumstances of the event which had so amazed him. His manner was that of a child startled amid its play, by a lightning-flash which strikes down one of its com-

panions. He was completely agitated and unstrung. Early in our acquaintance we had several verbal battles, in which, I need hardly say, I was easily vanquished. On one occasion, when I was lunching at his house, I was unsuspecting enough to avow my deep admiration for the American Poet, Walt Whitman. No sooner had I done so than I found that I had loosened an avalanche.

"No words were strong enough, no terms indignant enough, to express my host's loathing and contempt for poor Walt, and chiefly on moral grounds! As far as I was able, I stuck up for the defence of the man whom I revered this side of idolatry; but it was of no use, I was buried under the attack of Browning's copious vocabulary, and could only pant for breath. The squabble, the first serious one I had ever had with Browning, lasted until I rose to go, very glad indeed to get out of range. The next morning, to my amazement, I received a letter from the poet, which, for reasons of propriety, I am unable to print verbatim. The mischief was out, however. Although it did not appear that Browning had studied Whitman at all (which was singular seeing what an omnivorous reader Browning was) he was ready to pass judgment on him and to condemn him to instant execution, simply on the score of some miserable and possibly garbled quotation carried to him at secondhand.

"This struck me as neither right nor generous, and I had looked for something different from the poet of the 'Ring and the Book.' I suppose I had pitched my note of praise too high, and so my admiration of another modern poet was resented as an act of disloyalty, for I was busy just then in asserting, through the medium of the *Athenæum* and

other journals, that Browning was the biggest literary force we had had since Shakespeare. I have modified my opinion since then, but I am still convinced that Shakespeare had no more doughty descendant, and that the words of the modern man contain passages which it would be difficult to surpass, even in the writings of his great Master.

“My last meeting with him was at one of the Royal Academy *soirées*, which follow the annual dinner. By that time we had fallen asunder a good deal, though we never had had any open disagreement, but as years wore on my enthusiasm had lessened, and I was not in the way of being useful to him as a friendly critic. We had only exchanged a handshake and a few words, but I felt that his manner was a little chilly. I was informed afterwards that at the Academy dinner, when Lecky, in responding to the toast of Literature, had startled the company by generously and warmly eulogizing my ‘City of Dream,’ Browning had murmured to his next neighbour, ‘Of whom is he speaking? Of Buchanan, the writer of plays?’ I was just then collaborating with Sims on a melodrama for the Adelphi, and the question was construed by those who heard it, as an expression of ironical contempt.

“Naturally enough Browning may have fancied that in writing plays for the market I was selling my birthright for a mess of pottage, but he knew better than most men that I had no option—it was either that or practical starvation. Had he been less in the world and more liberal-minded, he might have remembered that to hew wood and draw water as a means of subsistence does not necessarily imply any loss of self-respect, and he would have observed that, so far at least as my work was concerned, I was

passing higher and higher towards my own ideal. On former occasions he had proclaimed his admiration for my work in terms as strong as any used by Lecky, and I cannot help thinking that, had I still been writing criticism, he might have been more tolerant of my occasional backslidings in literature. I well remember our meeting just after I had published 'White Rose and Red' anonymously. He bounded into my rooms with outstretched hands, and almost before we had exchanged a word launched out into eager eulogy of the work. I said something in smiling deprecation, but he did not listen. 'O, it's a *beautiful* poem! a *beautiful* poem!' he cried again and again, with florid emphasis on the adjective. I think he was honest, and I am sure I hope so; but I had powerful organs at my command at that time, and he knew it."

CHAPTER XI

FIRST BOOKS, 1863-66

MEANWHILE the young poet who was working very steadily, was taking Mr. Lewes's advice "not to publish too hastily." But much as he valued the opinion of his friends he longed to challenge public opinion, and as a result his first volume of poems was given to the world. The volume, which was entitled "Undertones," was published by Moxon and Co., towards the close of the year 1863, and the reception of it was cordial enough to satisfy even the wildest dreams of its author, for not only had he justified Mr. Lewes's faith in him, but he had secured for himself, at one bound, the much-coveted title of "Poet." His second volume of verse, "Idyls and Legends of Inverburn," was published in May, 1865, and the reception given to this book was even more encouraging than that which was accorded to his first venture. "The reputation which the earlier poems of Mr. Buchanan have acquired for him among all lovers of poetry cannot fail," said the *Sunday Times*, "to be greatly enhanced by this latest production of his ripening muse. It is by no means a constant rule that the promise contained in the early poems of an author is fulfilled in his later career. Youth is as completely associated

with poetry as Spring with blossoms, but with most men the leaves of poetry are soon shed, and the bloom, after its first short day of beauty, disappears and is seen no more. The publication of a first volume of poems implies therefore little, the appearance of a second volume, on the contrary implies much. It means that poetry is not the mere delight of youthful days, but the chosen and acknowledged profession of a life, that the author claims frankly to be received into that noble confraternity of bards from whose lips we have received our most noble teaching, and at whose hands we obtain all that refines and makes pleasant our life. On the present volume, then, if what we have stated be true, Mr. Buchanan rests his claim to be considered as a poet, and that claim few will be found to deny him. The voice of poetry seldom spoke more plainly or more loud than it does in the 'Idyls and Legends of Inverburn,' and those whom the exquisite fancy and rich sensuous grace of 'Undertones' had prepared for much, will find, we think, in this volume their most sanguine anticipations outgone." The second volume was published by Alexander Strahan, who at the same time took over the volume of "Undertones" from Moxon and Co. With this business transaction began a friendship between Mr. Buchanan and his publisher which only terminated with the poet's death. On hearing of this Mr. Strahan wrote: "It is with a pang of regret that I hear of the terrible blow which has fallen upon you and upon your wide circle of friends, to say nothing of the world at large, who are indebted to Robert Buchanan for many priceless works which will touch their hearts to noble issues for many a day to come. He certainly did not live in vain, although had he been spared to live a

little longer, he would undoubtedly have enriched the world still more than he has done. Peace be with him. His good qualities, and they were not few, were always appreciated and admired by me, and the world will not be the same to me now that this brave, unselfish man has gone from us—that the throbs of his wildly beating heart have ceased for ever.

“I suppose it is the case that all true passion makes us dumb—the deepest grief as well as the highest happiness seizes us too violently to be expressed by our words. At all events I am made to feel, in presence of this calamity, that silence is the perfectest expression of sorrow, for I should be but little grieved if I could say how much.”

Just before the publication of “Idyls and Legends of Inverburn” the state of my sister’s health became such as to make it quite clear that a permanent residence in London was not to be thought of, so the young couple removed to the (then) little village of Bexhill, and settled down for a time in a quaint gabled house built of red brick and surrounded with wonderful stretches of garden ground and orchard. The cottage was owned by a retired cobbler of Socialistic leanings, who attended to the garden, while his wife acted as general servant. After a time their domestic circle was enlarged by the appearance upon the scene of the late Mr. Gentles and Mr. Walter Maclaren, who has since become so well and widely known as a painter of Italian scenes. Another and a deeper friendship also dates from this time, for it was in the summer of 1865 that the subject of these memoirs made the acquaintance of the Hon. Roden Noel, for whom, all his life, he entertained feelings of deep affection. At the time of which I write Mr. Noel was staying at Hastings with his father, the late

Earl of Gainsborough, and he walked over one fine day and sent in his card while the Bohemians were at dinner. In those days Robert Buchanan was Radical to the finger-tips, and the prefix "honourable" on the young patrician's card awoke a strong prejudice within him, but no sooner had he come face to face with his visitor, and shaken his hand, and looked into his eyes, than he was spellbound with the thrill of love which began that day between them and lasted till the day Mr. Noel died.

"It is a far cry to that time now (wrote Mr. Buchanan in 1884), to the time when we swam together in the tumbling waters of the Channel, wandered in the Sussex lanes and talked of the old poets and the old gods. I got one of my first lessons in toleration when I first met and talked with the aged Earl of Gainsborough, simple, child-like, a Christian, and with that beautiful soul his Countess, a peerless woman and a loving mother. From this good and gracious stock came Roden Noel, fortunate in an inheritance of sane and gentle blood. His early youth had been spent at his father's seat in Rutlandshire, and at the Irish seat of his maternal grandfather, the Earl of Roden. At twenty he went to Cambridge with a view of studying for the Church, but religious scruples intervened and he never took orders. Soon after taking his degree he spent two long years in the East, visiting Egypt and the Holy Land, Lebanon, Greece, and Turkey, and gathering in the course of many romantic adventures the materials for some of his finest poetry. His marriage took place during this pilgrimage, and was a little romance in itself. Struck down with fever at Beyrout, he was nursed back to life by Madame de Broë, wife of the director of the Ottoman Bank, and he married her

eldest daughter Alice shortly after his recovery. That marriage, I think, was the crown of a fortunate life! It has kept this poet calm and happy at a time when most of us are troubled and storm-tossed, and it has given to him the consecration of a pure domestic love. While others have been fighting with windmills and struggling for bread, peace and rest have dwelt with the young wayfarer from Hellas; and if he has known, as all must know, the acute agonies of human sorrow, if his hearth has been darkened by the wings of the destroying Angel, the issue has still been holy, thanks to the faith that comes to us through Love alone. Often as his thoughts may wander back to Hellas, while the pagan stirs within his blood and he hears from afar the voices of the Dryad and the Naiad, the Satyr and Sylvanus, he has learnt by his own fire the one great modern lesson—that the god of Humanity has conquered and subdued to his own likeness all the gods of the world that lies beneath his feet.”¹

It was in the year 1894 that this dear friend was stricken down in death, when on his way to Stuttgart, and on hearing of the sad calamity the poet made the following entry in his diary:—

“If I survive beyond this lingering cloud of Time, those whom I have loved will survive with me, and not least of these is the beloved friend who was taken from me yesterday. He has been writing verses and publishing them for nearly half a century, yet few readers even know his name. A noble-hearted man, he has dwelt upon the skirts of life and literature, independent of all necessity to work for bread, and yet eager and willing to take his part in the great

¹ Preface to the Poems (Canterbury Edition) of the Hon. Roden Noel.

strife of modern thought. If any writer of verse possessed the deep poetic heart, it was certainly Roden Noel."

The first visit paid by Mr. Noel to the good old cobbler's cottage was only the prelude to many others, for the friendship, begun so auspiciously, throve apace.

"Even as I saw him approaching many years ago, my heart went out to meet him in the full certainty that he could speak to me of the hidden things of Hellas, of the vanished Wonderland where gods were born. This he surely did, so that for me, as for Sainte-Beuve, *Ganymede*, *Pan*, and the *Water-Nymph* lived again. . . . I do not know, I have not cared to inquire to what extent and in what measure Roden Noel accepts the popular religion (to my thinking a poet's opinions are of little consequence so long as they do not imply belief in baseness), but it is from popular religion that he derives his second great quality as a poet, that of moral exaltation. No singer of our time is so eager to perceive, so quick to apprehend the problem of Evil; in poem after poem he shows himself alive, not merely to personal sorrow, but to the pain of Humanity at large; yet no singer of our time of equal gifts is so stirred to exalted utterance by a spiritual message. Let it be noted that the poet's religious mood is as childlike and primitive, as direct and simple, as his former mood of pagan sensuousness. Nowhere in our language is personal sorrow more supremely expressed than in the noble series of poems called with touching tenderness, 'A Little Child's Monument.' This is a book for all loving souls, above all for the bereaven, and I am glad to know that its popularity with the great public has been in proportion to its merits as poetry. It is

not only with his own suffering as an individual, however, that the poet has to deal. His personal sorrow is merely a key to the great heart of humanity. Just as surely as he felt the joy and sunlight of the pagan world, does he feel the storm and stress of the post-Christian. The same vivid keenness of perception, of insight, is brought to bear here as there. Everywhere in the poem, 'Poor People's Christmas,' there is the same haunting sense of the details of misery and the eyes of the Christ look out upon us from the printed page.

"'The poor are Mine, that I may heal,' says the voice from the Cross. Roden Noel's so-called spiritual poems have, moreover, one great merit to distinguish them from the latter-day poetry of Christian apology; they are seldom or never rectangular and argumentative. The poet approaches the truth in the frank, free spirit of the lost paganism, eager to see all, to learn all, and to suffer and sympathise with all, and he finds his answer to the problem of Evil in his own heart-beats by becoming (according to the precept) even as a little child. . . . Fortunately for himself all the shafts of modern doubt have failed to penetrate the white armour of his fully reasoned faith. He has passed his forty days in the wilderness of moral despair only to return secure in insight and certain of his mission, which is to offer the good things of Hope to all men. He is, in other words, the poet of Christian *Thought*. Surely a strange sight is here; the young pagan fresh from the woodlands of Pan, and from the dark, shadow mountains of modern speculation, flinging himself down on his knees at the foot of the Cross!

"If we miss this fact in Roden Noel's poetry we shall miss its whole power and purpose. He is a

Christian thinker, a Christian singer or nothing. Not that I conceive for one moment that he accepts the whole impedimenta of Christian orthodoxy, he is far too much of a pagan ever to arrive at that. But he believes, as so many of us have sought in vain to believe, in the absolute logic of the Christian message : that logic which is to *me* a miracle of clear reasoning raised on false premises, and which to others is false premises and false reasoning all through. To me the historical Christ, the Christ of popular teaching, is a Phantom, the Christ-God a very Spectre of the Brocken, cast by the miserable pigmy Man on the cloudland surrounding and environing him. I conceive only the ideal Christ as an Elder Brother who lived and suffered and died as I have done and must do ; and while I love him in so far as he is human and my fellow-creature, I shrink from him in so far as he claims to be Divine. With Roden Noel, as with so many other favoured souls, it is different. Where we can find little comfort and no solution he finds both. He embraces in full affluence of sympathy and love that ghostly godhead, and credits *him* with all the mercy, all the knowledge, all the love and power which we believe to be the common birthright of Humanity, the accumulation of spiritual ideals from century after century. But where I and those who think with me are at one with Roden Noel is in the absolute moral certainty that, in the estimate of the Supreme Intelligence, what we *believe* counts for nothing, in so far as it merely represents what we *know*. The atheist and the Christian, the believer and the unbeliever meet on the same platform of a common beneficence. Faith in Love is all-sufficient without faith in any supernatural or godlike *form* of Love. There is nothing nebulous, however, about

Roden Noel's religious belief. It is clear, direct, and logically reasoned out. He is, moreover, in the highest sense of the word a spiritualist, as all true poets must be. The pessimism of Schopenhauer and Leopardi is as far away from his sympathy as the gross materialism of Holbach and Zola. Even disease transmutes itself under his tender gaze into images of loveliness and hope. At the present epoch of our progress thinkers of this kind are sadly wanted. The history of our poetry for the last twenty years has been a melancholy record of mere artificiality and verbalism; and in spite of the splendid flashes of power shown by one or two of our prosperous poets, there has been little or no effort to touch the quick of human life. True, the miasmatic cloud of Realism which is darkening and destroying all literature by robbing it of sunshine and fresh air, has not yet reached our poetry, the majority of those who write in verse being neither realists nor idealists, only triflers who imagine verse to be a school-boy's exercise or an idle man's amusement. If Poetry is ever to resume again its old prophetic function, and to regain any influence over the lives and thoughts of men, it will be through the help of such writers as Roden Noel."¹

Such was the man who, stepping into the place left vacant by the death of David Gray, became the most intimate and lifelong friend of Robert Buchanan.

¹ Preface to the Poems of the Hon. Roden Noel (Canterbury Edition).

CHAPTER XII

RETURN TO SCOTLAND, 1866

THE first sojourn at Bexhill was followed by a brief visit to France where, in the little village of Etretat, in Normandy, the poet familiarised himself with the scenes which were afterwards so graphically described in his romance, the "Shadow of the Sword." Returning to Bexhill in the spring of 1866, with the completed MS. of a new volume of poems ready for the press, he was met by the news of the dangerous illness of his father. Mr. Buchanan, who never really recovered from the blow which fell upon him in Scotland, had been stricken down in London, and there he was speedily joined by his son. My sister, who was always more or less an invalid, was at that time suffering from rheumatism in such an acute form that she had to be carried from room to room. She was therefore unable to accompany her husband on his visit to the sick-bed of his father, so at her earnest solicitation he was removed with all speed to Bexhill, where he received every possible attention. After his death his widow took up her residence with her son, with whom she spent the remaining years of her life.

In times of supreme sorrow the poet turned for consolation to the only thing which ever interested

him—his beloved poetry. While mourning his dear comrade, David Gray, he wrote one of the most beautiful poems in the English language, "To David in Heaven"—and in this, his second great sorrow, he conceived and commenced to write the poem, which was afterwards published under the title of "The Wandering Jew." It was not until some thirty years later that this poem was given to the world, and then the poet in some beautiful lines dedicated it to his father, who had been its inspiration.

Meanwhile the MS. which he had brought back with him from France had been sent to the printers. The book, under the title of "London Poems," was issued by Mr. Strahan, and its reception was such as to secure for its author a permanent place in the very foremost rank of English poets.

In the year 1896, in taking a general survey of Mr. Buchanan's poetry, Mr. William Canton said: "It was in 'London Poems' that Mr. Buchanan touched most acutely the quick of life; and I do not think it rash to say that never since has any one touched the same quick with such telling effect. Who that has read 'Liz' can have forgotten the poor slum-child's first venture from London into the green fields—the high green hill and the unclouded sun, and the smokeless blue, the trees and the soft winds and the singing birds, and who has surpassed in verse the poignant misery of 'Jane Lewson'?"

In the dedication to Mr. Hepworth Dixon, with which the book opens, Mr. Buchanan says: "'London Poems' are the last of what I may term my 'poems of probation,' wherein I have fairly hinted what I am trying to assimilate in life and thought. However much my method may be confounded with the methods of other writers, I am sure to get quartered

(to my cost perhaps) on my own merits by and by."

In connection with this book the author told a story which it may here be interesting to recall.

"When the *Fortnightly Review* was started, under the editorship of George Henry Lewes, I was among its first contributors, and published in it one of the longest of my 'London Poems'—the story of the flower-girl 'Liz.' Afterwards, when my poems of London life appeared in a volume, I sent an early copy to my friend and critic, who replied to the gift in a letter expressing disappointment. He did not like the book, and frankly said so—a serious blow to me, despite the praise of the journals and the work's phenomenal popularity. A few weeks afterwards, however, came a letter of cordial recantation. 'I have been in the country' (Lewes wrote) 'and have read your poems amongst different surroundings, in a fresh spirit and in solitude. I cannot now convey to you my full impression concerning them, but it is enough for the present to say that they moved and delighted me.' Another illustration of the truth that a good critic may form very contradictory impressions of the same work according to the spirit in which he reads and the nature of his environment."

Again in writing of this book, Mr. Buchanan said:—

"In 'London Poems' I was a great deal juster to the rude forces of my life, my sympathy was bolder and more confident, my soul clearer and more trustworthy as a medium, however poor might be my power of perfect artistic spiritualisation. As common life was approached more closely, as the danger of vulgarity threatened more and more to interfere with

the readers' sense of beauty, the stronger and tenderer was the lyrical note needed. In writing such poems as 'Liz' and 'Nell' the intensest dramatic care was necessary to escape vulgarity on the one hand and false refinement on the other. 'Liz,' although the offspring of the very lowest social deposit, possesses great natural intelligence, and speaks more than once with a refinement consequent on strange purity of thought. Moreover, she has been under spiritual influences. She is a beautiful, living soul, just conscious of the unfitness of the atmosphere she is breathing, but, above all, she is a large-hearted woman, with wonderful capacity for loving. She is, on the whole, quite an exceptional study, although in many of her moods typical of her class. 'Nell' is not so exceptional, and since it is harder to create types than eccentricities, her utterance was far more difficult to spiritualise into music. She is a woman quite without refined instincts, coarse, uncultured, impulsive. Her love, though profound, is insufficient to escape mere commonplace, and it was necessary to breathe around her the fascination of a tragic subject, the lurid light of an ever-deepening terror. In the language of both these poems I followed Nature as closely as possible, so far as poetic speech can follow ordinary speech. I had to add nothing, but to deduct whatever hid instead of expressing the natural meaning of the speakers; for to obtrude slips of grammar, misspelling, and other meaningless blotches—in short, to lay undue emphasis on the mere language employed—would have been wilfully to destroy the artistic verisimilitude of such poems. Every stronger stress, every more noticeable trick of style, added after the speech, was sufficient to hint the quality of the speaker, was so much over truth

offending against the truth's harmony. The object was, while clearly conveying the cast of the speakers, to afford an artistic insight into their souls, and to blend them with the great universal mysteries of Life and Death. Vulgarities obtruded is not truth spiritualised and made clear, but truth still hooded and masked and little likely to reveal anything to the vision of its contemplators. By at least one critic I have been charged with idealising the speech a little too much. Both 'Liz' and 'Nell,' it is averred, occasionally speak in a strain very uncommon in their class. In reply to this I may observe how much mispronunciations, vulgarisms, and the like, have blinded educated people to the wonderful force and picturesqueness of the language of the lower classes. They know nothing of the educated luxury of using language in order to conceal thought, but speak because they have something to say, and try to explain themselves as forcibly as possible."

While his new volume of poems was delighting the world the poet himself was strangely sick and sad at heart. After his father's death he found himself unable to settle down comfortably in Bexhill, so as soon as his book was fairly launched, and its success assured, he set his face northward, and after pausing here and there in his flight he finally went to Oban, and settled down in what was afterwards known as "The White House on the Hill." Here is his own description of it in the "Land of Lorne."

"In a kind of dovecot, perched on a hill far from human habitation, the Wanderer dwelt and watched, while the gloomy gillie came and went, and the dogs howled from the rain-drenched kennel. The weasel bred at the very door in some obscure corner of a drain, and the young weasels used to come fearlessly

out on Sunday morning and play in the rain. Two hundred yards above the house was a mountain tarn, on the shores of which a desolate couple of teal were trying hard to hatch a brood; and all around the miserable grouse and grayhens were sitting like stones, drenched on their eggs, hoping against hope. In the far distance, over a dreary sweep of marshes and pools, lay the little town of Oban, looking, when the mists cleared away a little, like the woodcuts of the City of Destruction in popular editions of the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' Now and then, too, the figure of a certain genial Edinburgh Professor,¹ with long white hair and flowing plaid, might be seen toiling upward to Doubting Castle, exactly like Christian on his pilgrimage, but carrying instead of a bundle on his back, the whole of Homer's hexameters in his brain. Few others had courage to climb so high in weather so inclement, and, wonderful to add, the Professor did not in the least share the newcomer's melancholy, but roundly vowed in good Doric that there was no sweeter spot in all the world than the 'bonnie Land of Lorne.'

"The town of Oban, prettily situated along the skirts of a pleasant bay, and boasting a resident population of some two thousand inhabitants, has been fitly enough designated the 'Key of the Highlands'; since from its quaint quay, composed from the hulk of an old wreck, the splendid fleet of Highland steamers start for all parts of the western coast and adjacent islands. In summer-time a few visitors occupy the neat villas which ornament the western slopes above the town, and innumerable tourists, ever coming and going to the sharp ringing of the steamboat bell, lend quite a festive appearance to the little

¹ Professor Blackie.

main street. As a tourist the Wanderer first made the acquaintance of Oban and its people, and resided among them for some weeks, during which time there was a general conspiracy on the part of everybody to reduce him to bankruptcy: extortionate boatmen, grasping small tradesmen, greedy car-drivers, all regarding him as a lawful victim. He was lonely, and the gentle people took him in; he was helpless, and they did for him; until at last he fled, vowing never to visit the place again. Fate, stronger than human will, interposed, and he became the tenant of the White House on the Hill. He arrived in the fallow season, before the swift boats begin to bring their stock of festive travellers, and found Oban plunged in funereal gloom—the tradesmen melancholy, the boatmen sad and unsuspecting, the hotel waiters depressed and servile instead of brisk and patronising. The grand waiter at the Great Western Hotel, one whom to see was to reverence, whose faintest smile was an honour, and who conferred a lifelong obligation when he condescended to pour out your champagne, still lingered in the south, and the lesser waiters of the lesser hotels lingered afar with the great man. All was sad and weary, and at first all looks were cold. But speedily the Wanderer discovered that the people of Oban regarded him with grateful affection. He was the first man who for no other reason than sheer love of silence and picturesqueness had come to reside among them ‘out of the season.’ In a few weeks, he not only discovered that the extortioners of his former visit were no such harpies after all, but poor devils anxious to get hay while the sun shone; he found that these same extortioners were the merest scum of the town, the veriest froth, underneath which there existed the

sediment of the real population, which for many mysterious reasons no mere tourist is ever suffered to behold. He found around him most of the Highland virtues—gentleness, hospitality, spirituality. No hand was stretched out to rob him now. Wherever he went there was a kind word from the men and a courtesy from the women. The poor, pale faces brightened, and he saw the sweet spirit looking forth, with that deep inner hunger which is ever marked on the Celtic physiognomy. Every day deepened his interest and increased his satisfaction. He knew now that he had come to a place where life ran fresh and simple, and to a great extent unpolluted.

“Not to make the picture too tender, let him add that he soon discovered for himself—what every one else discovers sooner or later—that the majority of the town population was hopelessly lazy. There was no surplus energy anywhere, but there were some individuals who for sheer unhesitating, unblushing, wholesale indolence, were certainly unapproachable on this side of Jamaica. It so happened that the Wanderer wanted a new wing added to the White House, and it was arranged with a ‘contractor,’ one Angus Maclean, that it should be erected at a trifling expense within three weeks. A week passed, during which Angus Maclean occupied himself in abstruse meditation, coming two or three times to the spot dreamily chewing stalks of grass, and measuring imaginary walls with a rule. Then, all of a sudden one morning, a load of stones was deposited at the door, and the workmen arrived, men of all ages and all temperaments, from the clean methodic mason to the wild and hirsute hodsman. In other parts of the world houses are built silently, not so in Lorne; the babble of Gaelic was incessant. The work crept

on surely if slowly, relieved by intervals of Gaelic melody and political debate, during which all labour ceased. Angus Maclean came and went, and of course it was sometimes necessary to advise with him as to details; and great was his delight whenever he could beguile the Wanderer into a discussion as to the shape of a window or the size of a door, for the conversation was sure to drift into general topics, such as the Irish Land Question, or the literature of the Highlands, and the labourers would suspend their toil and cluster round to listen while Angus explained his 'views.' In a little more than a month the masonry was completed, and the carpenter's assistance necessary. A week passed and no carpenter came. Summoned to council, Angus Maclean explained that the carpenter would be up 'the first thing in the morning.' Two days afterwards he did appear, and it was at once apparent that, compared with him, all the other inhabitants of Oban were models of human energy. With him came a lazy boy, with sleep-dust in his round blobs of eyes. The carpenter's name was Donald Mactavish—'a fine man,' as the contractor explained, 'tho' he takes a drap.' The first day Donald Mactavish smoked half a dozen pipes and sawed a board. The next day he didn't appear—'it was that showery and he was afraid of catching cold'; but the lazy boy came up, and went to sleep in the unfinished wing. The third day Donald appeared at noon, looking very pale and shaky. Thus matters proceeded. Sometimes a fair day's work was secured, and Donald was so triumphant at his own energy that he disappeared the following morning altogether. Sometimes Donald was unwell, sometimes it was 'o'er showery.' Tears and entreaties made no impression on Mactavish, and he took his

own time. Then the slater appeared with a somewhat brisker style of workmanship. Finally a moody plasterer strolled that way, and promised to white-wash the walls 'when he came back frae Mull,' whither he was going on business. To cut a long story short, the new wing to the White House was complete in three months, whereas the same number of hands might have finished it in a fortnight.

"Thus far we have given only the dark side of the picture. Turning to the bright side, we herewith record our vow, that whenever we build again we will seek the aid of those same workmen from Lorne. Why, the Wanderer has all his life lived among wise men, or men who deemed themselves wise, among great book-makers, among brilliant minstrels, but for sheer unmitigated enjoyment, give him the talk of those Celts—flaming Radicals every one of them, so radical forsooth as to have about equal belief in Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Disraeli. They had their own notions of freedom, political and social. 'Sell my vote?' quoth Angus; 'to be sure I'd sell my vote!' and he would thereupon most fiercely expound his convictions, and give as good a reason for not voting at all as the best of those clever gentlemen who laugh at political representation. At heart, too, Angus was a Fenian, though not in the bad and bloodthirsty sense. Donald Mactavish, on the other hand, was of a gentle nature, inclined to acquiesce in all human arrangement, so long as he got his pipe and his glass, and was not hurried about his work. With playful humour he would 'draw out' the fiery Angus for the Wanderer's benefit. Then the two would come suddenly to war about the relative merits of certain obscure Gaelic poets, and would rain quotations at each other until they grew hoarse. They had both

the profoundest contempt for English literature and the English language, as compared with their beloved Gaelic. They were both full of old legends and quaint Highland stories. The workmen, too, were in their own way as interesting—fine natural bits of humanity, full of intelligence and quiet affection. Noteworthy among them was old Duncan Campbell, who had in his younger days been piper in a Highland regiment, and who now, advanced in years, worked hard all day as a hodsman, and nightly, clean-washed and shaven, played to himself on the beloved pipes till overpowered with sleep. Duncan was simply delicious. More than once he brought up the pipes and played on the hillsides, while the workmen danced. These pipes were more to him than bread and meat. As he played them his face became glorified. His skill was not great and his tunes had a strange monotony about them, but they gave to his soul a joy passing the glory of battle or the love of women. He was never too weary for them in the evening, though the day's work had been ever so hard and long. Great was his pride and joy that day when the house was finished, and with pipes playing and ribbons flying, he headed the gleeful workmen as they marched away to the town.

“From that day forward the White House on the Hill remained silent in the solitude. Though the summer season came, and with it the stream of tourists and visitors, the Wanderer abode undisturbed. Far off he saw the white gleam of the little Town, but he seldom bent his footsteps thither, save when constrained by urgent business. Nevertheless, faces came and went, and bright scenic glimpses rose and passed, while day after day he found his love deepening for the Land of Lorne.”

Amid these scenes some of his best work was done. Following his "London Poems" came "Ballad Stories of the Affections" (1866), "North Coast and Other Poems" (1868), "The Book of Orm" (1870), "Napoleon Fallen" (1870), "The Drama of Kings" (1871), and "St. Abe and his Seven Wives" (1872). While in prose he issued "David Gray and other Essays," "The Land of Lorne," and "Master Spirits."

CHAPTER XIII

SPORT

HUNGRY at all times for any form of experience, and driven to various devices in his constant search for health, Mr. Buchanan was for many years what is known as a "sportsman"—in other words, he wandered forth with gun and rod intent, in the usual manner of Englishmen, on "killing something." He was never wantonly cruel, or a mere pot-hunter, and he disdained the savageries of the *battue*, preferring rather to seek game under the wildest conditions, at as much personal inconvenience and even peril as possible. There was a time in his life, indeed, when he thought that to lie out for wild duck among the marshes, hidden up to the neck among reeds, was the brightest pleasure in existence.

He was first persuaded to take a gun into his hand by Mr. William Black, who went down to Bexhill one snowy wintertide and persuaded him to go shooting over the marshes in the direction of Pevensay. I do not think he shot anything on that occasion, but Mr. Black killed one or two fieldfares, over which he was quite jubilant. When Mr. Buchanan went to Scotland one of his earliest experiences was wild-

goose shooting in the wilds of Uist, of which he gave some account in his Hebridean sketches.

"I shoot *very* little, but I have a fancy for having shooting round me—the wilder the better. I never go in for slaughter, even on a small scale. I find if I walk without some excitement I simply get ill, because my mind continues working out of doors; and so in the depths of winter I pursue snipe, grouse, and wild fowl. But I like fishing best, both because my conscience never quite acquits me for shooting at all, and because it is altogether a gentler art. You must know I have to humour my health, just as Bright kept his by salmon fishing."¹

Of course, as a sportsman he learned a great deal which he could hardly have learned in any other way. When he first went to Oban he hardly knew the difference between a cuckoo and a sparrow-hawk; indeed, he took the first cuckoo he saw for a small hawk, and was only instructed rightly by its cry. With regard to this same cry of the cuckoo, it has been described in the common English song—

"The cuckoo is a pretty bird,
It sings as it flies;"

he then learned that it did nothing of the kind, so he wrote—

"From rock to rock I saw him fly,
Silent in flight, but loud at rest."

It was delightful for him to learn those things, but I have heard him regret again and again that he did not learn them without the shedding of innocent

¹ Letter to Mr. William Canton.

blood. At that time he never realised that what he did was cruel ; indeed, he would have resented the charge with indignation. To harm or kill a living thing in cold blood, to pursue sport as some so-called sportsmen pursue it, in the manner of slaying tame or farmyard fowl, was always distasteful to him ; but if he had to face the elements and to seek the solitudes and to climb the mountains—if there was difficulty and fatigue and needful skill in pursuing his quarry, he thought himself justified in taking the life of grouse, or wild duck, or any other edible thing. Wantonly he never worked, never killing for the sake of killing, always justifying himself by the fact that what he killed was meant for human food. At the time when he thought sport justifiable he was more or less exercised on religious subjects, for he wrote the “Coruisken Sonnets” and the “Book of Orm,” the motto of which was Milton’s line—

“To vindicate the ways of God to Man.”

At no time in his life was he so tenderly observant of natural objects, so alive to the terrors and beauties of nature, or so pitiful to the sorrows of his fellow-men. Had he not lived in the solitudes and felt their spell to the soul, he could never have written such lines as those descriptive of autumn among the mountains—

“The heather fadeth ; on the treeless hills,
O’er rusht with the slow-decaying bracken,
The sheep crawl slow with damp and red-stain’d wool,
Keen cutting winds from the Cold Clime begin
To frost the edges of the cloud—the Sun
Upriseth slow and silvern—many Rainbows
People the desolate air. . . .”

Or these lines descriptive of his own condition—

“The World was wondrous round me—God’s green World—
A World of gleaming waters and green places
And weirdly woven colours in the air.
Yet evermore a trouble did pursue me—
A hunger for the wherefore of my being,
A wonder from what regions I had fallen,
I gladdened in the glad things of the World.
Yet crying always, Wherefore, and Oh, wherefore?
What am I? Wherefore doth the World seem happy?”

And so on and so on, the poem being full of one long wail to the effect that there must be a God, and that that God would certainly not let even the basest of men perish. He arrived at fine imagery and great poetry when he reached his “Vision of the Man Accurst,” which he could not compose without tears, and which has moved many a man and woman to compassion. I have heard him say that the blot on the “Book of Orm” is the fact that, with all its great pity for Humanity, it has not one word on the subject of our duty to the things beneath us. “I have often thought that if Jesus of Nazareth had lived among the civilised savages of the West, instead of in a land where the woes of human beings were paramount, another and a wonderful chapter would have been added to the New Testament, and in addition to the beautiful blessing spoken on little children we should have had such words as: ‘Suffer the dumb beasts and the birds of the air to come to Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ For really and truly that is the lesson which is forced more and more as evolution advances in the soul of every thinking man, that is the teaching imminent in the teaching of my beloved master, Herbert Spencer, when he sees in developing altruism the hope and potency of the

human race. For the most beautiful of all the beautiful things in the development of the modern scientific spirit (not the spirit of the vivisection-room or of the Pasteur Institute, but the loving and piteous spirit of advancing knowledge) is the revolt against cruelty in any shape, not merely to our fellow-men, but to all the gentle things that dwell beneath the sun.”¹ I never could understand how it was that he, a man full of loving impulses, ever came to pursue the savage pleasures of the average Britain. That he loved animals will be seen in the following letter to Mr. Canton.

“I am just now quite heartbroken. I have lost my best friend who loved me faithfully for nine years—a little Dog. He died, after months of pathetic suffering, on Friday last, just as I finished a letter to you ; and I have not rested or worked since. He lies close by me now, but I must bury him to-morrow and it tears my heartstrings. He was born just nine years ago, when my father was dying, and in the same house. I don’t know if you ever learned to fathom a dog’s living soul, but if you ever did, you’ll know my grief is not the mere trifle some would think it. I have not cried for nine years, but since Friday my eyes have never been dry. I bury him to-morrow close to the door, in a spot they call the ‘Fairies’ Knoll.’ It will be a miserable day to me. My household Fairy will lie there.”²

Now the evolution of supreme pity, which is only another word for justice, is often very slow, and it was slow in his case. I well remember his telling me that as a little boy in Norwood he was taken by a friendly butcher boy to the slaughter-house, and saw with complete equanimity the killing of sheep and

¹ Letter to Mr. Wylie.

² Letter to Mr. Canton.

oxen. He felt perhaps a little horror, but had no perception that what he saw was cruel. Later on, when a boy at school, he witnessed other brutalities, and not at first did he even sympathise with the sufferings of human beings. Gradually, however, his own sense of justice, conditioned by his mother's constant teachings of beneficence, awoke in him the enthusiasm of humanity. "I look upon the sporting episode as the crowning wickedness of my life, at any rate nothing that I can remember seems to tell so strongly against my claim to a comparatively decent manhood. There are times when the thing haunts me, and a voice seems to say 'Die and be forgotten as you deserve!' for all that time I was praying to God and wondering if my miserable soul was worth saving. I was clinging wildly to the dream of a personal immortality, and arguing that the sufferings of men deserved some eternal recompense. The sufferings of man? What of the sufferings of the gentle things which man, with diabolic and pitiless obtuseness, tortures daily and hourly for his wretched pleasure? What of the poor wounded hare, the panting deer surrounded by man-taught hounds, the fox pursued from copse to copse and 'enjoying' (as the egregious Trollope put it) the run to his death? Thank God, if I forgot for a time the poet's birthright of pity, the great poets of mankind had not forgotten it. Poor world-worn, sensual, tippling Burns had tears of compassion even for the field-mouse, ruined and beggared by the plough. It has been argued again and again that Nature herself is cruel, that animals wantonly destroy each other, and that, so far as the wild game is concerned, they must either be reserved as sport and food for men or be abandoned altogether. The pre-

ponderance of their experience, moreover, is (it is urged) on the side of enjoyment. Such arguments, to my thinking, are neither here nor there. The whole evolution of altruism is a revolt against nature, headed by the most supremely pitiful of men, the Nazarene. If it were only for its evil action on the higher nature of man himself, quite apart from the question of the suffering so wantonly distributed by man, cruelty in any form would be evil, and would make in the end for Humanity's deterioration and finally for its destruction." ¹

¹ Letter to Mr. Wylie.

CHAPTER XIV

HUMANITARIANISM

By Henry S. Salt

I AM asked to write my impressions of Robert Buchanan as a humanitarian, and I do so the more gladly because I think this aspect of his many-sided genius has generally been overlooked, though to some of his readers it constitutes not the least of his numerous claims to their gratitude and admiration. Whatever else may be said of him, in praise or dispraise, this can never be denied—that a passionate love of humanity lay at the root of his most memorable work, and that his great powers were enlisted on behalf of the weak and suffering, and in defiance of the tyrannous and strong. It will be said, perhaps, that humanitarianism is concerned with the lower animals as well as with mankind, and that Mr. Buchanan, who was at one time an ardent lover of sport, cannot be classed as an out and out humanitarian. I have no wish to lay undue stress on one side of his character, but it will be seen that, in his latter years, his sympathies were so widened as to include not only human beings but all sentient life.

It was, I believe, through our mutual friend, the Hon. Roden Noel, that I became acquainted with

Mr. Buchanan some ten or twelve years ago, and in 1892 and 1893 I had correspondence with him about the inclusion of some of his poems in an anthology of 'Songs of Freedom' which I was then editing, and on other literary matters. On March 4, 1893, he wrote to me as follows:—

"Many thanks for the brochure on Tennyson. It contains, to a great extent, the truth as I feel it, though I could not, owing to my personal relations with the poet, give it expression. Bunting asked me to write a memorial article on T. for the *Contemporary*, but I refused, on the score that if I wrote at all I should have to express my honest convictions.

"What a satire on literature it is, to find the whole world flocking to worship the poets of Good Taste, while a singer like James Thomson dies neglected! We are ringed all round with shams—sham sweetness and light, sham criticism, sham morality, sham Christianity; and the man who tries to break through must assuredly pay the penalty of his foolhardihood. To exist comfortably, one must dance like a tame bear in the middle of Society's charmed circle, and then the world will cry, 'How pretty! how self-controlled! how full of beautiful ideas!'—those 'beautiful ideas' which are the death of all honest manhood."

On August 10, 1894, he became a member of the Humanitarian League, of which I was Hon. Secretary. "I will gladly join your League," he wrote, "as I sympathise outright with all its objects." In the same letter he expressed a wish to see Francis Adams's "Songs of the Army of the Night," a copy of which I accordingly sent him. On this subject he wrote a few days later as follows:—

"Many thanks for the poems, which I have just

received on returning from a few days' run into Normandy; also for the pamphlets which have arrived. A glance at the newspaper notice reminds me of the piteous circumstances under which poor Adams died, and which impressed me very sadly at the time.

"I have only just glanced at the poems, and to be frank, feel rather repelled by some of them, finely human though they are. The indignation seems somewhat overdone, and the sympathy not too healthy. But I reserve all judgment till by and by, when I *know* the book, as far as my nature will allow me to know it. Of late years (I suppose it is because I am growing old) I am less in accord than I used to be with some forms of democracy, and I look forward with anxiety to a millennium of labour. Certainly the problem of human suffering will have to be solved, but will its solution come from the many-headed god, Demos? I doubt it. Is it not rather the inclination of Demos to suppress individual happiness, and to reduce life to a tyrannical rule of thumb? Is there much difference between a tyranny of one person and the tyranny of an organisation?

"*And* why do the labour people adopt the jargon of Christianity? Adams does so habitually. Surely the time has come to show that the mistakes of Christianity were the mistakes of its Founder?"

In 1894 Mr. Buchanan sent me a copy of his poem "The Devil's Case," referred to in the following letter, dated March 31st :—

"I am specially glad that you like the *form* of the 'Devil's Case,' for it was chosen after long thought, and I myself feel that no other form was possible. Not one of the idiots who have described it as easy and careless have perceived that it is subtly assonantic

and very difficult to manage. Your suggestion for a 'Satanic Series' is distinctly good, and I shall seriously think of it."

Readers of the "Devil's Case" will remember that it contains some magnificent humanitarian passages—

"Cast thy thought along the Ages !
Walk the sepulchres of Nations !
Mourn, with *me*, the fair things perish'd !
Mark the martyrdoms of men !

Say, can any latter blessing
Cleanse the blood-stain'd Book of Being ?
Can a remnant render'd happy
Wipe out centuries of sorrow ?

Nay, one broken life outweigheth
Twenty thousand lives made perfect !
Nay, I scorn the God whose pathway
Lieth over broken hearts !

Man, thou say'st, shall *yet* be happy ?
What avails a bliss created
Out of hecatombs of evil,
Out of endless years of pain ?

Even now the life he liveth
Builded is of shame and sorrow !
Even now his flesh is fashion'd
Of the creatures that surround him.

From the sward the stench of slaughter
Riseth hourly to his nostrils.
By his will the beast doth anguish,
And the wounded dove doth die."

In 1897 Mr. Buchanan, who had been one of the signatories of the memorial against the Royal Buckhounds, was asked to write a preface to a pamphlet entitled "The Truth about the Game Laws," which Mr. J. Connell was then preparing for the Humani-

tarian League. On October 10th he wrote to me as follows :—

“I shall be glad to see proofs of pamphlet, but I have to confess with shame that I was for years an ardent sportsman myself! I don't know whether 'tis merely sour grapes and advancing years, but I feel very differently now on the subject, and if I write for you should resemble the ‘converted clown.’”

The same confession was made by him in the preface itself, but this did not hinder him from writing a very strong and trenchant criticism of the sportsman and the game-preserver :—

“When all is said and done, however, sport, in so far as it embraces the hunting and killing of wild animals, is invariably more or less demoralising—is, in fact, a relapse from civilisation to barbarism. Therein lies its real fascination for men bored with the proprieties and duties of the nineteenth century. The instincts of the primeval man—food-hunting, predatory, self-preserving—re-emerge in the modern ; moral sanctions are disregarded, the rights of inferior races are forgotten, and the hunter feels himself, figuratively speaking, naked, savage, bloodthirsty, and unashamed. Sportsmen for this reason are invariably selfish and conservative. A sportsman who is a Radical in politics and a pioneer in social science is an impossibility.

“It is hopeless, therefore, to expect from sportsmen any sympathy whatever with the agitation against the cruel and iniquitous Game Laws. The agitation began, and it must continue, among the men who shrink from cruelty of any kind, and prefer the amenities of civilisation to the coarse pleasures of barbarism. Now, more than ever, the fight in the higher planes of life is between philanthropy and

savagery, culture and brutality, the pleasures of the thinking being and the amusements of the naked man."

Nor was it only on the question of sport that Mr. Buchanan had avowed humanitarian sympathies. There is a terrible and most impressive passage in his "City of Dream," in which he describes the vivisection of a dog in the Temple of Science—

"I look'd no more ;
But covering up mine eyes, I shrieked aloud
And rush'd in horror from the accursed place ;
But at the door I turn'd, and turning met
The piteous eyeballs fix'd in agony
Beneath a forehead by the knife laid bare !"

And in a later contribution to the *Zoophilist* (June 1, 1899) he reaffirms the same judgment on the tortures of the laboratory :—

"That which has hitherto been deemed most godlike in humanity, that which has brought comfort and hope and moral salvation to countless human beings, is the one thing which the arch-priests of a false science seek to eliminate for ever from the human conscience—the sentiment of Pity, which is only another name for the idea of Justice. If animals have no rights, then men and women have no rights ; if men and women have no rights, then the conception of a Divine Providence, of a Law which works invariably for righteousness, is no more than a drunkard's dream."

A few months after the publication of the Game Laws pamphlet the League was permitted to reprint a notable article on the "Law of Infanticide" which Mr. Buchanan had contributed to the *Star*, with reference to the case of Kate Shoesmith, the "Hetty

Sorrel" of the occasion. "No words of mine," he wrote, "could express the horror and the pity of the whole business ; yet the story is as old as our marriage market and is repeated with heartbreaking variations every day. . . . In truth we are still a savage and uncivilised people, able and willing to mow down with artillery such subject races as are not of our way of thinking, but utterly blind and indifferent to the sorrows of the weak and the sufferings of the martyred poor."

On November 2, 1898, he wrote to me with reference to his last volume of poems :—

"I am about to publish my 'New Rome ; Ballads and Poems of our Empire,' and much of it will appeal, I think, to your circle, though the critics generally will cordially detest it. It is an attack on our civilisation all round, in the name of Humanity. One poem in it, 'The Song of the Fur Seal,' was suggested by passages in your journal.¹ I shall really be glad of any sympathy you can show me, for I am certain to get very scant justice in other quarters. I have poured out the belief that is in me, however, and I don't think it will be altogether wasted."

"The New Rome" is indeed inspired by the most passionate humanitarian feeling. Under the title "Songs of Empire" the poet denounces the selfish and aggressive militarism which was then practising on native races the barbarities which have since reached their climax in the war on the South African Republics. His "Song of the Slain" breathes the true democratic spirit, and no more trenchant satire has been written of late years than his "Ballad of

¹ "The Cost of a Sealskin Cloak," by Joseph Collinson, reprinted from *Humanity*, as one of the Humanitarian League's pamphlets.

Kiplingson" and "The Chartered Companie." Nor are the poems conceived in a spirit of mere denunciation; for many of them express with consummate tenderness and beauty the new gospel of Humaneness. Here, for example, are some stanzas from "God Evolving," which might be taken as the hymn of Humanitarianism:—

"Where'er great pity is and piteousness,
Where'er great Love and Love's strange sorrow stay,
Where'er men cease to curse, but bend to bless,
Frail brethren fashion'd like themselves of clay.

Where'er the lamb and lion side by side
Lie down in peace, where'er on land or sea
Infinite Love and Mercy heavenly-eyed
Emerge, there stirs the God that is to be!

His light is round the slaughter'd bird and beast
As round the forehead of Man crucified,—
All things that live, the greatest and the least,
Await the coming of this Lord and Guide;

And every gentle deed by mortals done,
Yea, every holy thought and loving breath,
Lighten poor Nature's travail with this Son
Who shall be Lord and God of Life and Death!

No God behind us in the empty Vast,
No God enthroned on yonder heights above,
But God emerging, and evolved at last
Out of the inmost heart of human Love!"

On social questions Buchanan's outlook was not less humane, and his abiding sense of the close kinship of all sentient life is shown in many of his poems—in none perhaps more nobly than in the magnificent verses that have reference to "fallen women":—

"How? *Thou* be saved, and one of these be lost?
The least of these be spent, and thou soar free?
Nay! for these things are *thou*—these tempest-tost
Waves of the darkness are but forms of thee.

Shall these be cast away? Then rest thou sure
No hopes abide for thee if none for these.
Would'st thou be heal'd? Then hast thou these to cure;
Thine is their shame, their foulness, their disease."

Nor were the lower animals excluded from his sympathies, as is testified by the stanzas on "Man of the Red Right Hand," "Be Pitiful," "The Song of the Fur Seal," and many others. It is on this oneness of mankind, and of all sentient life, that Humanitarianism, if it be more than a passing sentiment, must be based, and this is the spirit in which "The New Rome" is written.

"I had been taught by sharp experience," says Buchanan in his preface, "that such poems were not *wanted* by the public." This sort of admonition, however, was always disregarded by him, and herein, perhaps, is the reason why his great poetical qualities have been so strangely undervalued in dominant literary circles. No thoughtful lover of poetry can be unaware that Mr. Buchanan's equipment, intellectual and artistic, would have been sufficient to fit out some half-dozen of the popular poets whom Society delights to honour; but his inveterate habit of calling a spade a spade almost condemned him to the *rôle* of a prophet crying in the wilderness. All the more, then, do humanitarians owe a tribute of gratitude to this most humane and fearless writer, whose poems are a living testimony to the fact that true poetry does not lose, but is greatly a gainer, by association with compassionate feeling. It is right that this side of Robert Buchanan's genius should receive the appreciation which it deserves.

CHAPTER XV

READINGS, 1868-69

WHEN he returned to Scotland the shadow against which Bryan Procter first warned him had not yet descended upon him. He was free, for the time being, to write poetry, and to dream that it would procure both bread and a foothold in the world. His "London Poems" had succeeded beyond his expectations. Encouraged by the success of his translations from the Danish, published under the title of "Ballads of the Affections," and consisting for the most part of renderings from the "Danske Viser," Messrs. Dalziel had offered him four hundred pounds for his next book of poems, on the condition that they might issue it, as they had issued the "Ballads," with illustrations. This they did, and the volume, containing some of his best work, was published under the title of "North Coast and other Poems." I fancy that the work failed for one reason or another to show a profit to the publishers, such original poetry as it contained being quite out of the way of those who buy expensive illustrated books. The poems which it contained, however, were magnificently noticed by the Press.

By this time he was settled comfortably at Oban, and was living the life of a regulation country gentle-

man. His tastes were expensive, and he gratified them. He had his shooting and his fishing, while his yacht was riding at anchor in Oban Bay. From time to time as the humour seized him he boarded this little craft and made sundry excursions among the outer Hebrides, gaining in each of these expeditions fresh poetical inspiration such as that which came to him when he stood upon the lonely shores of Loch Coruisk and conceived the series of poems which were afterwards published under the title of "Coruiskens Sonnets." It was from Loch Slighan, Isle of Skye, that he wrote the following letter :—

"August, 1868.

"DEAR NOEL,—You will think me a beast for my silence, and indeed I reproach myself daily for my neglect of you and other dear friends. I cannot, however, help being a bad correspondent ; and moreover each letter is so much taken from my scant literary hours. Were I to write to you as often as I think of you, and as kindly, you would be sick—with sugar.

We have had a long wander, roughing it a good deal both literally and figuratively, and we have drunk much wonder by eye and ear. The little craft we sail in has behaved bravely and gone through her work like a lady of the old Norwegian school—with a fierce grace. I have thought much and written little, eat little and walked much. I don't know that I am much the better in health for this cruise—the cuisine has been a little *too* bad ; but I shall enjoy civilisation better when I next enter an eating-house.

'How goes your book? You never told me what Chapman said, or how he said it ; and you never sent me that Heroditan romance, of course. My horrid bigotry revolts you. Well ! you will think my

views larger some day, when I have had my full say. Meantime I am merely mumbling an odd music with little meaning to the foreign. That I do not love all you love, that I do not see all you see, that I do not hope all you hope are misfortunes; but with a little clearer light, some day, we shall find we agree better than we think. I am doubtless silly and fantastical when your Arnolds and your Swinburnes, even your Tennysons, do not anyway move me, any more than my crude stuff moves them. I really do believe it is some vice in myself; yet were you to know me alone, when I have been reading of Sancho's government, or of the Miltonic epos, or of poor Jack Falstaff's death—of these and a thousand other beloved things—you would know I could love something, much. It is my vice that I must love a thing wholly, or dislike it wholly. Of contemporaries, I love only a few wholly. You see I have only been half educated, and my tastes are very raw.

"But one thing let me confess—my total obtusity about Clough. I have not read a line of him since, yet all at once the light has grown on me of its own accord, and I see that Clough was a star—not one in the same heaven with my Chaucer and my Shakespeare, and my Burns and my Cervantes—but a pure scholastic light, real and everlasting.

"I don't know what will come next, but I shall try to get to London for a month soon, when I hope to get a little more of your company. I have great bothers of course, and am still troubled; but the clouds clear. I was shipwrecked in the night, but I swam for shore, and am looking out for another ship. Where will you be in October? Write to

"Yours always,

"ROBERT BUCHANAN." ¹

¹ Letter to the Hon. Roden Noel.

As will be seen from the above, the cloud was descending, for he was beginning to feel the discomfort caused by a small income and a heavy expenditure. Added to this the writing of poetry, which was always a great strain upon him, was beginning to affect his health. "You do not remember," wrote one of his old friends to me during his last illness, "because you were only a child, but I remember that as far back as those Oban days he had a slight stroke of some kind. He was very ill then, and his brave young wife nursed him back to life."

The cause of this breakdown arose partly from overwork, and partly from the privations which he had endured when he first came to London. There is a general impression abroad that he was a self-made man—that he rose, if not exactly from the gutter, at any rate from very poor surroundings, and that he never knew what it was to eat a good dinner till he was able to earn it by his pen. That this impression is a perfectly erroneous one I have shown in the earlier chapters of this memoir. His upbringing, until he reached the age of eighteen, was princely, for his indulgent mother never left a single wish of his ungratified, so that when at length poverty came to him, the very novelty of the situation helped to rob it of its repulsiveness. He took to it very much as a young aristocrat might take to "slumming," and all the time he was happy in the knowledge that it would certainly not last long. The few months spent in the garret at Stamford Street, when he was waited upon by shockheaded "Belinda" and compelled to eat stale eggs for breakfast, became an episode in his career, and one to which he was never tired of referring. The struggle

for existence which darkened his whole life was mainly the result of his early training—a taste for luxury of all kinds had been instilled into him by his mother, while from his father he inherited a love of speculation. From neither had he learned the value of money ; when he had it he spent it like a lord, when he hadn't it he lived upon credit, and then, finding himself in difficulties, he endeavoured to extricate himself by hard work, or by plunging into hazardous speculations which very often had the effect of sinking him still deeper in the mire.

To such a man a wife fashioned on the lines of Jane Welch Carlyle would have proved a blessing, but my sister had unfortunately been cast in much the same mould as himself. She had no idea of managing, or saving, or thinking of to-morrow. "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof" was her motto, and so like a couple of babies they muddled through life, tasting sometimes of its joys, but oftener of its sorrows.

Up to this time (1868) five years had elapsed since the publication of his first volume of poems, and during those five years he had published many more, yet in spite of the large sums which he received from these volumes, and in spite of much ignoble pot-boiling, he found himself at the close of the year 1868 in such monetary difficulties that he was compelled to face the situation and cast about in his mind for some kind of work which would be more lucrative than that of literature, with the result that after a good deal of deliberation he determined to follow in the footsteps of Dickens—to emerge from his solitude and give readings from his own works on the public platform. This he did, on January 25, 1869, appearing at the Queen's Concert Rooms, Hanover

Square. His appearance in public created no little stir; and the audience which he drew was an exceptional one. "In front of him sat Lord Houghton, on his right was Robert Browning, near him Dr. Westland Marston and the Rev. Newman Hall. The body of the room was full of literary men, critics, editors, publishers, but he was not afraid of his critical audience; he faced them boldly, read manfully and well, and wrung from them for his best passages the tribute of enthusiastic applause." There cannot be a doubt that he was in every way well fitted to succeed in the path which he had elected to tread; "he had a pleasing and distinct delivery, a voice of compass and power, and a prepossessing appearance." "If all our writers" (said the *Examiner*) "were as capable as he of doing histrionic justice to their works, we should consider them not only unwise but positively culpable in not treading the same path as that so manfully traversed by Charles Dickens and Robert Buchanan."

The success of the second reading, which took place in March, was as great as that of the first, and had he been blessed with even moderate health all would have been well with him. Offers to read and lecture came from all parts of the country, and a prosperous future opened before him, but his highly strung nervous system was unable to bear the strain of these public appearances, and after the second reading had been given he returned to Oban, so broken in health that for a time at least every kind of work had to be abandoned. It was at this period of his career that the late Mr. Gladstone granted him a Government pension of a hundred pounds a year, which sum he received until his death.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FLESHLY SCHOOL OF POETRY, 1870

IT was in the summer of 1870, when he was still living at Oban, that Mr. Buchanan read the poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, which had been received with much praise by the entire newspaper press, to the accompaniment of rapturous salvos from the writer's friends and personal admirers. In all the ocean of *eau sucrée* which surrounded the new poet there had not been one drop of gall; and the cliques were ringing with the pretensions of the whole school to which the poet-painter belonged. By temperament, instinct, and literary education Robert Buchanan was opposed to that school, and the voice of calumny whispered that insults had been heaped upon his own friends and sympathisers. He remembered too things which still rankled in his mind, and to which allusion will be made later on. Unfortunately for himself he yielded partly to the desire to express his opinion of the poems which criticism was praising, he thought, too vehemently, and partly to the temptation to be smart and funny at the expense of a clique whose antics were, to his thinking at least, highly absurd. The result was an article published in

the *Contemporary Review* signed "Thomas Maitland," and entitled "The Fleshly School of Poetry."

The story of that article is now old literary history, but I must traverse it again with a view to the partial exculpation of the one who, ever since the publication of the article in question, has been made the subject of endless slander and misconception.

"My own career" (he wrote) "may be cited as an example of the difficulties which must beset any individual who is rash enough to despise coterie friendships altogether. No man loves praise more than I do, and few men of equal gifts have got so little, ever since the time when my natural indiscretion conquered me and I began to express decided opinions. I have had many friends, but few of them, alas! have been professional Critics, and I alienated those few long ago by refusing to accept their judgments as authoritative or to express complete confidence in their integrity. But here again, what has it mattered? I should have been more loved had I been more lovable, and doubtless I have only got my deserts. I may flatter my vanity at times by assuming that I am not properly appreciated, but I know well in my heart of hearts that a man as a rule gets what sympathy he earns, and that I have earned exactly what I have received. I may affirm or insinuate that I am an honest creature, while all the Critics of the Coteries are either knaves or fools, but I know well in my heart that I am not a bit better than they are, and am indeed as arrant a Logroller as any one of them. Blood is thicker than water, and Love is stronger than Criticism. Let me illustrate the fact again in my own person. I published many years ago an article called the 'Fleshly School of Poetry.' It created a tremendous stir and

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provoked endless recriminations, and the question which I am about to answer now is, Was it an *honest* article, *i.e.*, did it actually represent my honest belief? To answer that question I must refer to the *fons et origo* of the whole affair. Not long before its publication Mr. Swinburne the poet had gone out of his way to print, in a note to one of his prose essays, an insulting allusion to the friend of my boyhood, David Gray, whose premature death I still mourned deeply. He spoke contemptuously and cruelly of Gray's 'poor little book,' an allusion emphasised, I was assured, by other spiteful comments of the Coterie to which Mr. Swinburne belonged. I showed the note to Lord Houghton; he was much surprised and vexed, and said (I quote his actual words): 'O he (Swinburne) did this to annoy *me*!' Whatever motive inspired the allusion, it seemed to me most ill-timed, offensive, and cruel; and I vowed then and there to avenge it if ever I had the opportunity. I am not justifying my conduct; I am simply describing it. I am not naturally revengeful, but remember I was very young and my dead friend was very dear to me. Well, I bided my time. I forgot the provocation I myself had given by my review of Mr. Swinburne's 'Poems and Ballads' in the *Athenæum*,—a review in which, I am ashamed to say, I compared the writer to the Gito of Petronius. The retort came, not merely in Mr. Swinburne's fierce exculpatory brochure, but in Mr. Rossetti's pamphlet defending his friend, in the opening passage of which I was called 'a poor and pretentious poetaster who was causing storms in teacups,' the allusion being to the success of my 'London Poems.' From that instant I considered myself free to strike at the whole Coterie, which I finally did, at the moment when all the journals were

sounding extravagant pæans over the poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

"My criticism in the *Contemporary Review* was not conscientiously dishonest; I really believed then that Rossetti was an affected, immoral, and overpraised writer. I was not alone in that opinion, absurd as I consider it now. Shortly after the publication of my review, Tennyson avowed to me *vivâ voce* that he considered Rossetti's sonnet on 'Nuptial Sleep' the 'filthiest thing he had ever read.' Browning in private talks had been equally emphatic. Thus encouraged, I faced at last the men who had (I thought) trampled down the flowers on poor Gray's grave, and

'When I struck at length
Their honour, 'twas with all my strength!'

In spite of the shriek of protest raised, the blow was decisive; the Coterie collapsed like a house of cards."¹

At the time of the publication of this criticism Mr. Buchanan was under contract to supply Alexander Strahan, for the *Argosy*, the *Contemporary Review*, and other of his publications, with so much magazine copy monthly. His contributions being very varied in character, including verses and descriptive articles as well as more serious matter, were frequently unsigned and more frequently signed pseudonymously, and his first idea was to publish the criticism on Mr. Rossetti without any signature whatever, so it was Mr. Strahan who attached to it the pseudonym "Thomas Maitland." It is certain, however, that Mr. Buchanan had no intention of signing the article

¹ "Latter Day Leaves."

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with his own name, for at that time the coterie had most of the literary journals, including the *Athenæum*, at their absolute command, and would be certain, he thought, to use them to discredit his criticism. I am not saying this in order to justify the course adopted, I am merely stating a fact. His motive was, I know, primarily revenge, his opinions dictated by a wrath which he considered righteous, as well as by a literary antipathy which he considered just.

He had not long to wait before learning that he had thrust his staff into a hornet's nest. The authorship of the article soon became known; he avowed it indeed directly his name was mentioned in connection with it, and as he had meant all along to avow it sooner or later. The critical journals described him as a "disguised assassin," stabbing a brother artist in the back and then hiding his head in darkness. The *Saturday Review* alone defended him, and ridiculed his opponents in an article called "Coterie Glory." Fiercer recriminations followed, culminating in Rossetti's protest, published in the *Athenæum*, in the re-publication of the review in pamphlet form, with large and savage additions, and in Mr. Swinburne's "Under the Microscope." But in the meantime the fiery attacks upon him had brought unknown friends into the field, who were just as eager to support him. The late Cardinal Manning sent him a private message, approving what he had done and desiring to make his acquaintance. Tennyson and Browning were on his side, tacitly if not openly, and a large number of less famous people sent him messages of sympathy and congratulation. The late Lord de Tabley, then the Hon. Leicester Warren (author of "Philoctetes") helped him to design the cover of his pamphlet by supplying him with drawings of the

various flowers of the wayside, and so pointing the moral of the diatribe.

Nevertheless he was practically left to fight his battle alone, no one daring or caring to provoke the hostility of his enemies by a public expression of opinion; and for months, nay for years afterwards, he was assailed with every insult that malice could invent for his destruction. So cruel indeed and so relentless was this persecution of him, that when, in the year 1872, he published his poem "St. Abe and His Seven Wives," he found it expedient not only to issue the book anonymously, but to take every precaution to prevent the name of the author from becoming known. The secret was so well kept that when a representative of a leading London daily newspaper went to Mr. Strahan (the publisher of the book), showed him the proof of a highly laudatory review two columns in length, and promised that it should appear the very next day if he would tell him (in strict confidence of course) the name of the author, Mr. Strahan refused to speak, and as a consequence no notice of the poem appeared in the columns of the journal in question. The book however (since it could not be proved to be written by Robert Buchanan), did not fail to make its mark. Indeed both "St. Abe" and its successor, "White Rose and Red," were welcomed by the public and received by the journals with such roars of applause as certainly would not have greeted them had the secret of their authorship become known.

Writing in the *Christian World* in July, 1876, some five years after the publication of the famous pamphlet, the Rev. W. H. Wylie said—

"Had they perceived the truth, Mr. Swinburne and his friends would have been grateful to Mr. Buchanan

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for the advice he gave them. He told them to abandon blasphemy and the sensual vein of Baudelaire. . . . This excellent advice, instead of being gratefully received, was spurned ; and any one who desires to see the unholy wrath which it provoked in the breast of Mr. Swinburne has only to turn to the pamphlet 'Under the Microscope,' in which he replied to Mr. Buchanan, pouring forth such torrents of invective as, fortunately, have few parallels in the range of English literature. Having delivered his soul in the article of 1871, I am not aware that Mr. Buchanan has ever published another syllable about the Fleshly Poets ; but when the story is told of how they have laboured to discredit him, both as a man and a poet, it will form one of the most humiliating episodes in the literary history of our generation. To escape the band of Mohawks by whom he was relentlessly pursued, he has on more than one occasion betaken himself to anonymous publication ; and I am aware of one instance in which a leading evening journal has, within the same week, assailed a new poem bearing his name with violent invective, and welcomed another poem, which was also his, but which he had taken the precaution of issuing anonymously, as the work of a man of undoubted genius. The appearance last year of 'Jonas Fisher' was made a peg on which to hang another series of attacks on Mr. Buchanan. That poem, at first appearing anonymously, they ascribed to his pen, led into this error by the fact that Lord Southesk had also spoken his mind pretty plainly about the Fleshly School. When Mr. Buchanan disowned the imputed authorship of a work which he had not even seen, and with the writer of which he was then totally unacquainted, Mr. Swinburne still continued the attack. It seemed to the victim of

these libels that the time had at length arrived when a decided step should be taken to put a stop to the malicious slanders; and accordingly he appealed to the strong arm of the law. It was a hazardous experiment, for it seems to be a prevalent notion that one poet may libel another with impunity; and all the damage that could be inflicted on the plaintiff by an ingenious cross-examiner like Mr. Hawkins was, of course employed to discredit his case. But I am happy to say that the cause of justice triumphed, even before a special jury in the Court of Common Pleas; and after having the whole story opened out before them, which I have here compressed into a brief compass, that jury delivered a verdict for the plaintiff, with damages £150. It adds to my satisfaction to learn that the presiding judge, Mr. Justice Archibald, condemned in most unqualified terms the productions against which Mr. Buchanan tabled his protest five years before. Speaking of the works of Dante Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris, &c., the judge declared that 'it would have been better if they had never been written, and that if all the poetry of the Fleshly School were committed to the flames to-morrow, the world would be very much the better for it.'"

I grant the provocation, but, as I have shown, the first blow was struck by the other side, and the whole conduct of the fight appears to me to have been mean and cowardly on that side from first to last. When Mr. Buchanan attacked Mr. Rossetti, he attacked, as he thought, a strong man—he was not showering rancour on the helpless dead. Had he conceived for a moment that his words would have caused so much pain, he would never have written as he did, but in this instance he

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himself had been attacked far more savagely again and again, and had taken his punishment like a man. He could not understand then, indeed he never could understand, how any clique of men could take a piece of adverse criticism in so paltry and pusillanimous a spirit. But the moment he saw in what spirit his criticism had been received, the very moment he realised that he had been the cause of such bitter pain, he came forward and made amends, both in his inscription to "God and the Man" and in his mature appreciation of Mr. Rossetti in his "Look Round Literature." Nevertheless I would gladly, if I could, wipe this episode from the record of so large-hearted and high-minded a man as Robert Buchanan or, failing that, persuade myself and my readers that his motives in the attack were consistently honest and high-minded. But in telling the story of this quarrel I have above all things attempted to speak the truth, as he would have wished me to speak it, thus leaving the public to mete out their own measure of praise or blame. His motives, it seems to me, were complex, first among them being the determination to be even with the men who had insulted his dead comrade. Add to that a young man's irritation at the exaggerated praises heaped upon work which then seemed to him artificial, affected, and insincere.

It is certain that Robert Buchanan, more than most men, suffered from wilful misconstruction and deliberate persecution, but more than most men, on the other hand, he asserted his intellectual independence and held on his own way towards his own ideals. I should exaggerate perhaps if I said that he was indifferent to misconstruction—no man is able to despise, or has any right to despise, the opinion of his contemporaries, but I can safely assert that in his

case the pleasures of independence far outweighed the pains of personal martyrdom. Praise is sweet to us all, blame is bitter enough, but in his case neither blame nor praise affected one hair's breadth his fight with his own conscience.

CHAPTER XVII

LIFE IN IRELAND

IN the year 1874 his occupancy of the "White House on the Hill" came to an end, and he left Scotland for ever. Various circumstances contributed to this move, first among them being the condition of his health, about which he had very serious misgivings, certain symptoms pointing to probable paralysis. With the breakdown in health came the inability to work and consequently to meet his weekly expenditure, which at that time was considerable. He persuaded himself, moreover, that the climate of Scotland did not suit him, so his yacht was sold, his shooting given up, and he came again to London not with the idea of settling there, but merely to consult certain doctors, and to search the advertising columns of the newspapers for a country residence the expenses of which would be considerably less than they had been at Oban. Doctors King Chambers and Russell Reynolds had both been consulted, when the subject of these memoirs was strongly advised by the late Countess of Gainsborough to call in Dr. Gulley, in whose system she had the most implicit faith. Her advice was acted upon; Dr. Gulley was called in, with the result that Mr. Buchanan was sent to Great Malvern and placed

under the care of Dr. Fernie, who had become Dr. Gulley's successor.

He was taken to Malvern by his wife, who has recorded in her journal that "though the weather was intensely cold (February 28th) Robert bore the journey pretty well." They were met at the station, and found that apartments had been taken for them at Holyrood House. The journal goes on to state:—

"*Feb. 29th.*—We rose at nine o'clock and found the ground covered with snow. Most depressing—even the houses look depressed. Our apartments are most oddly situated; we have a doctor on one side, an undertaker on the other, and I think a churchyard close by. The bell is constantly tolling. Baths close to our window and making a dreadful noise through letting off steam by machinery. Robert so cold he has to wear his cap and gloves. Dr. Fernie called in the afternoon, and in the evening, as the weather was warmer, we took a walk and became a little better impressed with the town.

"*March 2nd.*—Robert went through his first tortures. It has been a lovely day and we went for a drive, but it was dreadfully dull. In the evening we walked for about a mile, and when we had covered half the return journey Robert's leg became bad again—loss of power in it—but I managed to get him home. Once there he became worse. He had flushing in the head, numbness in the right cheek, and he lost power in his hand too. Went to bed, but did not get much better all the evening, though he had a fairly good night. The bell is still tolling!

"*March 13th.*—When we were out walking this morning Robert complained of being in a violent

perspiration, feeling muddy in the head, and very nervous, and so we hurried home. Have strongly advised him to leave as he seems to get no better."

A few days later they returned to London, and Mr. Buchanan placed himself under the care of Dr. Lobb, but as the symptoms from which he suffered seemed to continue with more or less severity, he decided to return again to Malvern and make a further trial of the water treatment. This he did on March 29th.

"Travelled to Malvern. Rose at eight and took a hasty breakfast. Right leg very bad while walking down steps to cab, and continued so throughout the drive to the station. Left town by the ten train. Felt pretty well till we got to Worcester, then became very ill with swelling feeling in right arm and face. Took stimulant drops and brandy and got slightly better. Arrived at Malvern about three o'clock, felt leg very bad while walking from train to cab. Had a tea-dinner on arriving, but did not get thoroughly well all the evening. To make matters worse Polly has contracted a bad cold."¹

During this time, although he was always more or less unwell, he had not been idle, for on March 12th I find the following entry in my sister's diary:—

"Robert finished and posted complete poem, 'White Rose and Red.' Neuralgia away, but right cheek bothering him very much and head rather bad during the evening."

The second visit to Malvern, which lasted several weeks, was productive of no better results than the first. Mr. Buchanan's health got steadily worse and his pocket proportionately lighter. "It is awfully dull and damnably dear," he wrote; "in fact a perfect

¹ Mr. Buchanan's diary.

catarrh of cash. . . . I got a lighter heart directly I had seen Reynolds and Gulley, and they to some extent dissipated my greatest dread.”¹

Having convinced himself that no great good would result from a lengthened stay at Malvern, he resolved to try again the remedy of an open-air country life. With this object in view he rented, from an advertisement in the *Field* newspaper, a furnished cottage called Rossport Lodge, which was situated in the very wildest parts of the wilds of Connemara. He had had no previous knowledge of Ireland whatever, his decision to make the experiment having been brought about by the wish to obtain a certain amount of luxury with the least possible outlay. With the discovery of Rossport he seemed to have found exactly what he wanted. The Lodge was small, fairly furnished, and comfortable enough. Included in the rent there was the right to burn unlimited turf, which was also brought to the house free of charge, there were two or three thousand acres of wild, rough shooting, the right to fish in a couple of rivers well stocked with salmon and trout, the use of a horse and car three days a week, and the rent was fifty pounds a year!

By the courtesy of Mr. William Canton I am enabled to quote from a very interesting and very voluminous packet of letters which he received from Mr. Buchanan during the period of the latter's residence in Ireland, and the following quotation gives a very graphic picture of the poet's surroundings at that time:—

“*Don't* imagine me ‘looking out from a garden’ on the Atlantic! We have no gardens here. My ‘Lodge’ is a little place in the centre of a bog, surrounded by

¹ Letter to the Hon. Roden Noel.

huts even wilder than those you paint in Romaine. I am ten miles from Belmullet, a wretched little town something like Tobermory in the Highlands. There is fair snipe-shooting and salmon-fishing in summer. I wish you could see Kid Island, a weird place out in the sea surrounded by wondrous caves and haunted by legions of birds. Photographs quotha! You have a dim notion indeed if you think a photographer has ever been here. A young 'kern' of my acquaintance went the other day forty miles distant to Ballina, and *saw the Train!* He trembles at the memory of that appalling sight. They tried to persuade him to get into a carriage, but he was not such a fool! Superstition flourishes. They believe implicitly in the Mermaid, the Second Sight, the Water Bull, and all the rest of it. Such are we here; and as we vary our monotony by occasionally shooting a landlord, our life is not uneventful."

The main reason for his going to Rossport, that of retrenchment, was not accomplished. "I came here for economy" (he wrote), "and just now, calculating up, I find it costs me as much as London, though we only live in a tiny cottage. There are so many Poor who must and will be assisted."¹

Despite its drawbacks, which were not few, the time spent in Rossport was productive of much happiness. With the change to these surroundings, Mr. Buchanan's health rapidly improved, and his power of work became greater than it had been for many months. "I simply cannot work in Town, but directly I get here, though I take twice the exercise, and am *out* thrice the time, I do twice or thrice the work. I never felt one tithe of the literary power I feel now, and the results will make or mar me. So

¹ Letter to Mr. Canton.

much for *Oxygen*. Not that I feel quite the thing—I never do that, and I suppose few do.”¹

The place was certainly inconvenient, for not only were we forty miles from a railway station, but we were ten miles from a post-office or any kind of shop, and had it not been that my sister, who loved nothing so well as a country life, soon turned the shooting-lodge into a miniature farm, we might often have gone hungry to bed. As it was we baked our own bread, reared our own poultry, and when they killed a sheep at the barracks, invariably took a good portion of it as our share, while for other provisions my sister had only to dip into her store cupboard, which had been well stocked soon after our arrival. Thus we were able not only to have our own wants supplied, but to feed half the starving villagers besides. But it was not alone for their generosity, which was always of the most lavish kind, that the poet and his wife endeared themselves to all the poor of Rosport; it was also for their great tenderness to all the sick and afflicted. As an amateur Mr. Buchanan was a most able doctor, and my sister was a particularly skilful nurse, and since the nearest doctor lived ten miles away, the poet and his wife were soon called upon to tend the village sick. This they did with never-ending patience. Indeed I have known my sister to be called up in the middle of the night, and to tramp for miles over a wet and slushy moorland in order to tend some miserable peasant woman who, but for her kindly ministrations, would most surely have died. When she left the village, which she occasionally did to pay a short visit to London, there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth, while to celebrate her return bonfires were

¹ Letter to the Hon. Roden Noel.

lit, and the Lodge surrounded by a sorry-looking lot of creatures who had gathered together to bid her welcome home. We seldom or ever saw a newspaper, and our letters were delivered to us three times a week, when we were so lucky as to get them delivered at all. The post-boy, "Johnny the Ferry" as he was called, had to fetch the letters from Belmullet, a distance of ten miles. Sometimes he got a lift on a side car, but oftener he had to do the journey on foot, and that, too, in the wettest and stormiest weather, so that occasionally the letters arrived in such a state of dilapidation as to be almost unreadable. The post usually came in at nine o'clock at night, and went out again at 7.30 in the morning, an arrangement which we found exceedingly inconvenient when a book happened to be going through the press, as, when proof-reading had to be done, it generally meant sitting up till the small hours of the morning. In this way Mr. Buchanan corrected the proofs of the "Shadow of the Sword" and I those of the "Queen of Connaught."

But the life we led there was by no means dull. For society there was the parish priest—Father John Melvin—a particularly handsome man who loved a game of chess and a glass of whiskey, and who could produce on occasion one of the finest glasses of potheen ever brewed in Connaught.

During one of our periodical visits to London we brought with us some of Father John's potheen and presented it to Charles Reade, who was so enthusiastic over it and who set such store by it that when producing it at his own table he insisted upon having it served in the tiniest of liqueur glasses. There was Father John's curate, Father Michael

Geraghty, a delicate, refined youth of some three-and-twenty summers, whose pathetic life-story was so touchingly told in the novel which was published in 1898 under the title of "Father Anthony," while Rossport House, the only other habitable dwelling in the village besides our own, was occupied by Colonel Campbell, his wife, and four bonnie daughters; and last, but not least, there was the Protestant clergyman the Rev. G. H. Croly, who dwelt in Polothomas, just across the ferry. Those were days to which the poet ever looked back with pleasure, and when he published his novel "Father Anthony," he referred to them in a dedication to the parish priest.

"DEAR FATHER JOHN,—I am inscribing this book with your name in memory of our many meetings among the sea-surrounded wilds of Erris. Certain scenes and characters in it will be familiar to you, and in 'Father Anthony' himself you will recognise a dim likeness to one whom we both knew and loved. For his sake and also for yours, I shall always feel strong affection towards the Irish Mother-Church, and towards those brave and liberal-hearted men who share so cheerfully the sorrows and privations, the simple joys and duties of the Irish peasantry.

"As I close the unpretentious tale, for which I claim only one merit, that of truth to the life, I look back with regretful tenderness to the happy years I spent in Western Ireland and to the friends whom I found there to 'brighten the sunshine.' Some have already passed away; dear 'Father Michael,' who sleeps in his lonely grave at Ballina; and the good 'Colonel,' blithest and best of hosts and truest of sportsmen, at whose table you denounced the 'Saxon,'

to the Saxon's unending delight, joining afterwards till the rafters rang in the chorus of 'John Peel.' Ever leal, faithful, brave, and honest, tolerant to all creeds yet staunch and steadfast to your own, you survive, beloved still, I am sure, by all that know you, and still carrying with you the brightness of a kindly gospel and a broadly human disposition.

"Yours always affectionately,

"ROBERT BUCHANAN."¹

At this point of my narrative I recall an incident which it may be interesting to relate. The Colonel was an omnivorous reader. He subscribed to Smith's library, and regularly every month came his box well stocked with books, which he was always ready to lend to any member of our little colony, but his reading was limited to prose, the lists which went in never by any chance including the name of a volume of poems. Once, however, a terrible mistake occurred. In the publisher's announcements the Colonel one day saw the advertisement of an anonymous work entitled, "St. Abe and his Seven Wives: a Tale of Salt Lake City," and, without waiting to ascertain whether the work in question was in prose or verse, he hastily added it to his list. On the arrival of the box the mistake was discovered and the offending volume was cast into a corner and left there. Some little time later it was taken up, quite by chance, and looked at. Having read a few lines, the Colonel became interested; he read the poem to the end, and his enthusiasm knew no bounds. That same night he appeared at the Lodge with the book in his hand. He had brought it for the poet to read, and having recommended it with all the enthusiasm

¹ Dedication to "Father Anthony."

of which he was capable, he said how much he would like to meet the man who had written it. The poet listened and smiled, but my sister revealed the secret of the authorship with no little pride. Up to that time the friendship between the two men had not been of the closest, for the Colonel, it must be admitted, was in every way the opposite of the poet. Both were Scotchmen, but while one was generous to a fault, the other was what is termed "close," especially in the matter of sport, keeping to himself his knowledge of the best pools in the river, or the "warm corners" on the moor. But now all was changed—the King could do no wrong—the poet was at liberty to fish in the Colonel's river if it so pleased him, or to shoot on his land, and following the theory that by pitch one is defiled, the Colonel, by intimate association, imbibed a good deal of the generosity and good-heartedness of his neighbour. From having been tolerated in the village, he became liked, and indeed he was soon quite popular. But much as he esteemed the poet, he never learned to like poetry; indeed, he ever regarded it with horror, despite the fact that he had derived so much pleasure from the reading of "St. Abe and His Seven Wives."

Another friendship which dates from this time is that of Charles Reade, whose acquaintance the poet made during one of his visits to London, and of whom, many years later, he wrote the following touching reminiscence:—

"It was in the summer of 1876 that I first made the acquaintance of Charles Reade, at a little dinner given by Mr. John Coleman, then manager of the Queen's Theatre. The occasion was one especially interesting to me, as the great novelist (for great and in some respects unparalleled he will be found to be

when the time for his due appraisement comes) had expressed a desire to meet my sister-in-law, who although still a very young girl in her teens, had risen into sudden distinction by the publication of the 'Queen of Connaught.' Pleasant beyond measure was that night's meeting ; pleasanter still the friendly intimacy which followed it, and lasted for years ; for of all the many distinguished men that I have met, Charles Reade, when you knew him thoroughly, was one of the gentlest, sincerest, and most sympathetic. With the intellectual strength and bodily height of an Anak, he possessed the quiddity and animal spirits of Tom Thumb. He was learned, but he wore his wisdom lightly, as became a true English gentleman of the old school. His manners had the stateliness of the last generation, such manners as I had known in the scholar Peacock, himself a prince of tale-tellers ; and, to women especially, he had the grace and gallantry of the good old band of literary knights. Yet with all his courtly dignity he was as frank-hearted as a boy, and utterly without pretence. What struck me at once in him was his supreme veracity. Above all shams and pretences, he talked only of what he knew ; and his knowledge, though limited in range, was large and memorable. At the period of our first acquaintance he was living at Albert Gate, with the bright and genial Mrs. Seymour as his devoted friend and housekeeper ; and there, surrounded by his books of wonderful memoranda, he was ever happy to hold simple wassail with the few friends he loved. Gastronomically his tastes were juvenile, and his table was generally heaped with sweets and fruits. A magnificent whist and chess player, he would condescend to spend whole evenings at the primitive game of

'squares.' In these and in all other respects he was the least bookish, the least literary person that ever used a pen ; indeed, if the truth must be told, his love for merely literary people was small, and he was consequently above all literary affectations. His keen insight went straight into a man's real acquirements and real experience, apart from verbal or artistic clothing, and he was ever illustrating in practice the potent injunction of Goethe—

'Greift nur hinein in 's volle Menschenleben !
Ein jeder lebt 's, nicht vielen ist 's bekannt,
Und wo ihr 's packt, da ist 's interessant !'

"His sympathy was for the living world, not for the world of mere ideas ; and as his sympathy so was his religion,—not a trouble-haunted, querulous questioning of truths unrealised and unrealisable, but a simple, unpretending, humble, and faithful acquiescence in those divine laws which are written in the pages of Nature and on the human heart.

"He read few books and abominated fine writing. I well remember his impatience when, taking up a novel of Ouida, and being pestered with a certain abominable iteration about an 'Ariadne,' he sent the book flying across the room before he had reached the end of the first chapter. For the literature of pure imagination he cared little or nothing, perhaps not quite enough. Among the letters of his in my possession is one in which, referring to certain conversations we had had on the subject of poetry, he utters the following dicta, following them up with the charming playfulness which was his most pleasant characteristic : 'Even Tennyson to my mind' (he says) 'is only a Prince of Poetasters (!) I think with the ancients, in whose view the Poetæ Majores were

versifiers who could tell a great story in great verse and adorn it with great speeches and fine descriptions; and the Poetæ Minores were versifiers who could do all the rest just as well but could not tell a great story. In short, I look on poetry as fiction with the music of words. But, divorced from fiction, I do not much value the verbal faculty, nor the verbal music. And I believe this is the popular instinct, too, and that a musical story-teller would achieve an incredible popularity. *Réfléchissez y!* Would have gone in for this myself long ago, but can only write doggerel. Example—

“You and Miss Jay
Hope to see my play;
I hope so too.
Because—the day
You see my play,
I shall see *you!*”

Vive la poésie!—Yours ever very truly, READE.’

“Here I may appropriately refer to his habit of signing with his surname only those letters which he reserved for intimate friends. In all his personal relations he was completely frank, charming, and gay-hearted. On the back of a photograph before me taken at Margate, whither he had gone for the benefit of his health, he wrote as follows:—

“‘DEAR MISS JAY,—I enclose the benevolent Imbecile you say you require. It serves you right for not coming down to see me!—C. R. All previous attempts were solidified vinegar. This is the reaction, no doubt!’

“This was written not long before he encountered the great trouble of his later life, when the good and

gracious friend who had made his home delightful to all who knew him was suddenly and cruelly taken away. 'Seymour,' as he used to call her very often, possessed much of his own fine frankness of character, and knew and loved him to the last with beautiful friendship and devotion. From the blow of her loss he never quite rallied. His grief was pitiful to see in so strong a man ; but from that moment forward he turned his thoughts heavenward, accepting with noble simplicity and humility the full promise of the Christian faith. Fortunately, I think, for him, his intellect had never been speculative in the religious direction ; he possessed the wisdom which to so many nowadays is foolishness, and was able, as an old man, to become as a little child."¹

¹ "A Look Round Literature."

CHAPTER XVIII

FIRST IDEAS OF NOVEL WRITING

IT was during the period of his residence in Ireland, about the year 1874, that Mr. Buchanan made his first bid for popularity by the writing of prose fiction. His first idea in this connection was to write in collaboration, and so he made the following proposition to Mr. William Canton:—

“I am tempted, believing in you so much, to propose collaboration in a *story*, I supplying the theme, to be modified as we might mutually agree, and you doing your fair half of the working-out. Your strong picturesque style would suit me, and I don't think the public would see the ‘joins!’ In suggesting this, I bid for something very high indeed; a first-class theme, first-class work, and (I hope) a first-class success. I think I have a grand subject ready to hand. The work would be either anonymous, or under a pseudonym or anagram embracing our two names. In this kind of joint work Erckmann-Chatrian have been very successful. Let me hear from you, and ‘if ’twere done, ’twere well if ’twere done quickly.’ . . . I find I have some of the story-sketches by me; so I send them to you to look over. The story of which they form part ran

thus: The young fellow in Chapter I. was the Lord of Uribol in disguise ; he made love to and ran away with the girl Minna ; she went with him to London, and there discovered he was a bigamist, having married a drunken widow in India ; she fled his house in horror when they were in an hotel in Edinburgh, and rushed out into the streets ; here she would have perished, if she had not suddenly encountered the poor wanderer Angus-with-the-dogs ; and the great strength of the tale was to be her journey home on foot in his company, until she fell on the way, and was delivered of a child. Meantime the remorseful husband returned to Uribol in a smack, and was wrecked on the Morig Dhu, a reef of rocks, while Angus-with-the-dogs, returning one wild night home to Uribol, pulled out from his breast, along with his usual puppies, a baby-child—the Heir of Uribol ! This is vague enough, but you are keen and will see the possibilities. The tale is only *written* as far as chapter 5 or 6, and I think could be easily transferred to this wild Irish Erris, for the people here are the very same race, the same habits, customs, peculiarities, as the Hebrideans. Angus could turn into Andy ; Glasgow into Dublin ; Uribol into Erris. Tell me what you think of the tale, and can you suggest any alteration of the plot, &c. ? If you thought the story very strong we might make *this* our first anonymous venture.”¹

This first proposition came to nothing, though the story, of which the foregoing is a dim outline, was subsequently written by Mr. Buchanan himself, and published in the year 1881 under the title of “A Child of Nature.” Though the first venture came to nought, the idea of collaboration was not abandoned,

¹ Letter to Mr. Canton.

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for on December 20th Mr. Buchanan again wrote to Mr. Canton :—

“MY DEAR CANTON,—I send you abstract of the other plot. It was originally meant for a poem, but long reflection convinces me it must be prose. To some extent founded on facts it ought to make a magnificent book. I send you two or three fragments of the (crude) verse, a sketch of first ten chapters, and one rough draft of chapter 10. If you will also refer to Vol. I. of the *Argosy*, and to two articles called ‘Wintering in Etretat’ by John Banks (J. B. is your humble servant), you will have an idea of the sort of village, but Brittany is better than Normandy. For Brittany simply describe the Hebrides, with a dash of Blackpool slush, and you will go all right; nothing can be too wild, weird, and strange for that coast. It would be as well for you to read ‘Le Foyer Breton’ and ‘Les Derniers Bretons’ of Souvestre for Breton folklore, &c. I have the books in London if you cannot procure them. But in fact consult any sources that occur to you—only remembering we don’t want any *cram*, but a simple strong natural poem in prose.

“Now will you try your hand on the first chapter or two of this tale, and let me see them? As the subject is intense and gloomy later on you cannot be too brightly poetical and easy in the opening. I leave the girl Joan to you so far she must be a bright foil to Romaine; and whatever village worthies you like, may come in. The idea is, in a natural and striking way, to trace the evil influence of *Avatarism* on a simple individual, how from a gentle loving soul, Romaine gets turned into something terrible, how his life becomes a sort of *microcosm* of War and Rapine;

and how finally God avenges him, and proffers to the Avatar the same simple cup of sorrow. I don't think we can be too simple and realistic in such a tale. Let us have plenty of love by all means, in the beginning at all events.

"Let me know by return how you feel this theme, and after I get your first chapter or two I will map out our several parts. But pray suggest any *improvements* and *modifications* that occur to you, especially any that will lighten the brooding intensity of the tale.

"Thanks for the printed story. I will read it of course. That you have the power to do fine work of this kind I am convinced.

"There is no reason why we should not do both tales. As to Erris it is simply the Hebrides. Any sea, you ask? As old Paul Bedford used to say, 'I believe you, my boy.' The surge from Labrador thunders at my door; the cliffs equal Skye and Gareloch; there are headlands and islands innumerable; and in fact, read any description of the Western Isles, and you see Erris. The same people too—Celtic, speaking the same tongue with only slight differences of accent—*e.g.*, they say in the Hebrides *bridā* (salmon) and here *bridāwn* (I write phonetically). My Angus is here as well as there, and this is new soil. I know a grand specimen of a priest, Father John Melvin, who spouts Homer like Blackie, and as for the quaint specimens of human nature that throng around us, it would do your heart good to see them. I have just parted with an old Beggar woman, the strangest of Gaberlunzies, whose story is the saddest and most wondrous thing I ever heard—such self-sacrifice is little less than divine. By the way, did you ever read my 'Eiradh of Canna'?

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I daresay not, so I enclose it. I pride myself on it as a masterpiece (!) and often think of a volume of such studies.

“Ever yours,
“ROBERT BUCHANAN.”

“ROSSPORT, BELMULLET,
“December 26, 1874.

“MY DEAR CANTON,—Your enthusiasm makes me hope for wonders. It *is* a good subject. Fire away and God-speed. I am writing to London for the French books.

“One word of solemn warning. In praising the theme you call it *Hugoic*. No one admires Hugo more than I do—I have called him the ‘Æschylus of this generation’—but I conjure you to work as far away from his *style* as possible. You cannot have a better model in your mind than Hawthorne, or a worse than Hugo. I mention this because your powers of imitation sometimes run away with you! I know you’ll forgive this warning for the sake of all my faith in you; I wait with anxiety for your first chapters. Your enthusiasm rekindles mine.

“I am laid up with catarrh and cough and am therefore rather stupid. I spent Christmas in bed, and couldn’t even look a goose in the face!

“Yours very truly,
“ROBERT BUCHANAN.”

“ROSSPORT.

“MY DEAR CANTON,—I have only just time to say that I have glanced through the first chapter and like it well; it only needs curtailing, or rather having some of its matter transferred. Go on; and get in

some dialogue. I shall grasp you better after a few chapters. You shall have *all* the books by next post ; they will reach you Sunday or Monday.

“Yours, in great haste,

“ROBERT BUCHANAN.”

“ROSSPORT, BELMULLET, *Jan.*, 1875.

“MY DEAR CANTON,—I send you entire sketch of chapters of Vol. I. You will see that I want you to stop at end of your chapter 4, when I will take up the thread for two chapters,—you continuing on chapters 7 and 8—then me for 9, 10, and 11—then you for four more, then last two by me. You can skip straight on from four to seven without waiting to see my intermediate chapters, as they will be to some extent independent of previous and subsequent chapters. Leave the schoolmaster to me, please ! I think the road is now pretty clear for Vol. I. If any links seem clumsy we can easily ‘tittyvate’ them afterwards.

“We must alter the Curé a little. He is a little too stereotyped—too saintly, not sordid enough. Oh that we could transfer to paper a certain priest here ! I will try to make a few marginal suggestions and alterations for this purpose. Still I think we *might* be ready at Easter.

“If on reflection there are any of the chapters *you* would rather write, that you feel an *impulse* to write, tell me ! Also if you can think of any situations, however quiet, where the girl might come out stronger.

“Go ahead !

“Sincerely yours,

“ROBERT BUCHANAN.”

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ROUGH SKETCH OF VOL. I.

Overture

Chapter.

- C { 1. On the Crag. Romaine and Yvonne.
- C { 2. As written. Meet Curé.
- C { 3. Curé—Schoolmaster—Corporal.
- C { 4. Continued.
- B { 5. Romaine and Schoolmaster.
- B { 6. Schoolmaster's tale of his own life. Reminiscences of the Terror, &c. He is a strong Republican and peace-lover, his favourite book being Rousseau's "Contrat Social."
- C 7. At the fountain. The Conscription, &c., ending "first on the list of names was that of Romaine Bisson."
- C 8. The Conscription. Old Ewen's harangue to the recruits, and speech about the great Emperor. Journey to Romaine's hut. Yvonne's journey. Romaine there. She offers to pin the conscript ribbon to his coat, but he turns *deathly pale* and springs away.
- B 9. The Schoolmaster is by the roadside miles away. Romaine suddenly appears to him. He encourages Romaine's revolt. Reads him MS. Man against Napoleon. A Sergeant appears, but Romaine escapes.
- B 10. Affairs in village. Pursuit after Romaine. Sketch of the Political state of France. News from seat of war. Romaine branded as a coward. Yvonne's sorrow. Romaine appears to Yvonne.
- B 11. Yvonne and Romaine. He disappears. She believes him a coward.

- C 12. An interval of weeks. Discovery of Romaine's hiding-place by Clovis. The light in the cliffs.
- C 13. (Same as chapter 6 in first sketch) only adding the 'tremendous header' by which Romaine first eludes them.
- C 14. The siege (same as chapter 7, first sketched).
- C 15. (Same as chapter 8, first sketched).
16. (Same as chapter 9).
17. (Same as chapter 10) ending with the mirage.
- End of Vol. I.

An average of 20 pp. to each chapter.

The above is the rough sketch of Vol. I. of the story contemplated—the letters B and C standing for Buchanan and Canton.

"ROSSPORT, BELMULLET, *Jan.* 15, 1875.

"MY DEAR CANTON,—Chapter II. is better than chapter I.—better and freer. The cathedral bit is good especially. You must now, however, get in some dialogue-chapters, with glimpses of village character. I forgot to say that I think you should make Yvonne a *little* stronger, not *quite* so clinging; she is however very nice as she stands. How comes she to have her distaff on the cliff though? Again I have to alter the bit about the slaying of birds; it is out of keeping with the man's character; egg-hunting will suffice. All these are trifles. The writing as a whole is excellent.

"Yours,
"R. B."

"*Jan.* 18, 1875.

"MY DEAR CANTON,—I thought I said the old officer was the girl's *uncle*—if I wrote 'father' I

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blundered. My idea too was that she should be an orphan whose father had died afield, and who was filled by the Bonapartist with intense military enthusiasm; otherwise you lose the point of her thinking Romaine a coward when he won't *fight*. Your idea of the imperial scene at Boulogne is good. It might be described at the fireside of the old Bonapartist to an eager circle of listeners, Clovis included, the only dissentient being Romaine.

"Our conscription must be long before Leipsic. The meeting of the two must take place at Fontainebleau, just when all N.'s own marshals have deserted him, and he has signed the unconditional abdication. If not then, after Waterloo. It is doubtful which is best.

"Do not forget that Brittany as a whole was *legitimist*. We might have a chapter reminiscent of the Chouans. By the way, there are some Breton glimpses in 'Quatre-vingt-treize,' which I have not yet read, however.

"Can you copy my memoranda and MS. and return them to me?

"A new character to appear in early chapters—an old *itinerant* schoolmaster, who lives by teaching from farm to farm, and has seen much of civil war, &c. A believer in rights of man and the higher revolution, but poor withal. Very poor, even ragged. Has had a strange influence on Romaine. On the lonely seashore and in caves they have read together. He might have one pet book, only one, besides his breviary, &c. But what book? Plutarch's 'Lives'? Pascal? Rousseau's 'Confessions'? This is a matter for reflection.

"As I said, when I get the new chapter or so I will finally portion out our tasks. So far, so well, I think.

"Yours very truly,

"ROBERT BUCHANAN.

"There is a gale raging here as I write, against which even the wild geese can hardly fly. Typhus is raging a few miles off, killing even the doctors. In fact all the agents of Providence are busily at work!"

"ROSSPORT LODGE, Feb. 17th.

"DEAR CANTON,—Chapter 7 will do. Forgive my delay in writing to say so. Of course Easter is now out of the question, but we'll get ahead. This in haste; will write again directly, but am neck-deep in work.

"Yours ever,

"ROBERT BUCHANAN."

"Feb. 26th.

"MY DEAR CANTON,—I am sorry my silence made you anxious. I have been very busy and much worried: far too much of both to write any of 'Romaine.' Nothing has miscarried that you sent. The days flash by like lightning, and I find hardly a moment to spare.

"I forget such at this moment, but I fancy the phœbe-bird is the lapwing—if not that, the golden plover—the latter may be called a dun bird, but its flash of under-wing is bright as possible in flight. I forget the passage even in my own poem, but I'll look it up. My memory is overstocked.

"I have answered your last *seriatim*, you see.

"Go on with 'Romaine' with as much heart as you can throw into it—

'Twill be a credit to us a',
We'll a' be proud o'—Romaine!

If it does not turn out a fine work the fault is ours,

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not the subject's. But Easter is out of the question. I don't know how you stand, but I fear I cannot touch my portion for some little time yet, for I must have *everything* else off my mind ere I begin. I suffer much here from the want of books of reference; otherwise I get on well. It's hard to carry all one's dates and quotations in one's own head.

"Thank God I am *not* ill, though *always* shaky more or less, like a man on thin ice. I trust we shall meet this summer; perhaps you and Mrs. C. may think of a run into the wilds of Erris, if you dare face rough quarters. Meantime don't despair—you are doing the story as well as I could wish, and write as often as you can.

"Yours most truly,

"ROBERT BUCHANAN."

"April 14, 1875.

"MY DEAR CANTON,—I forget which of us wrote *last*, so if I owe you a letter forgive me. I have been distraught on various accounts; partly with work. And you, I suppose on your side have been so deep in the folds of that 'top coat,' as to have forgotten 'Romaine.' If so wake up! The first free week I get I mean to plunge headlong into that work, but it wants thought, silence, and care. Sometimes I almost regret the poetic form. But I will write fully about it soon. I have just now to finish an article on 'The Modern Stage,' commissioned for the *New Quarterly Magazine*. *Apropos*, I send you the new number. It has a little sketch by me of Peacock. . . . What are you doing? By the way, my sister-in-law wants very much to read 'A Poet's Love Letters,' if you can send them. Has the poem made any progress? I still hold to my opinion that your shorter

pieces should be prefaced by a longer, more important work, and when that is ready, heigho for a Publisher! Only do get a good subject; 'tis half the battle. . . . I should be glad to assist your views in this or any way if I knew how. You really ought not to be doing drudgery. Write.

“Always yours,
“ROBERT BUCHANAN.”

“April 30th.

“MY DEAR CANTON,—I have been trying week after week to get a good serious look at ‘Romaine.’ Something always interferes. I think however in a few days I shall be comparatively free.

“I am longing for a run to London, and bitterly bemoaning that I have not seen Salvini! The worst of this region is its inaccessibility!—the journey to Town being both arduous and costly. I think I *shall* be in Town shortly, if only for a few days.

“Yours,

“R. B.

“The Spring is just putting on her bright face here. For three or four days the heat has been tropical. Yesterday I realised our opening chapter of ‘Romaine,’ though I was under, not over, the cliffs, in a ‘curragh,’ or boat, made of canvas and wooden skeleton. By the way, your sea-parrot *is* the puffin; they are thronging in by thousands and pairing. I caught my first salmon of the season a month ago, so the winter’s back is fairly broken.”

“May 12, 1875.

“MY DEAR CANTON,—Miss Jay and I agree that the ‘Letters’ are charming, although not in the least ‘real.’ With a few exceptions which I shall mark, they

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are most pleasant reading, and would go in admirably with your poems. The allusions to your humble servant are kind, though I fancy a *leettle* strained, especially the allusion to the 'Two Sons.' Don't you sometimes write with exaggeration of what pleases you, and overestimate the importance of trifles which strike you as new discoveries? 'Two Sons' is pretty enough, but I fancy a reader turning to it after your 'note' would be disappointed. Take, again, the remarks on Shakespeare. Do you *really* feel that he drinks you up like a drop of dew? or do you not rather feel that his humanity, while so many-sided as to amaze and divert you, never touches the diviner heights of Biblical and Æschylean purity? There are times, I think, when Shakespeare's feudal style is dissatisfying. This from one who loves Shakespeare as much as any man, but who smiles when enthusiastic poets (in love) write—nonsense! about him!

"Forgive me, for I like the clippings amazingly, and I will do all I can to get 'em a Publisher. It won't be easy. The gentry hate poetry from unknown poets . . ."

"May 19, 1875.

"MY DEAR CANTON,—Shall you be very much—awfully—disappointed if I decide that the prose form won't suit 'Romaine' after all, and that I should like to adhere to my original plan of making it a poem? I am not decided, remember, but reading your chapters carefully, after long reflection, I seem rather *afraid*. Not but they are excellent in themselves, but somehow, they don't quite fulfil my feeling for the *nuances* of the story. This impression might disappear after more were written, but I dread going

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on till I feel more certain. *If* I decide against you, of course I shall pay you for your trouble.

“Don’t think for a minute I am disappointed in your work ; it’s not that ; the disillusion is *in myself* solely. And after all it may disappear.

“Ever yours,

“ROBERT BUCHANAN.”

Again the plan of collaboration fell through—not from any fault on Mr. Canton’s part, as the foregoing letters will show, but merely because the poet’s brain was too full of other things to allow him to give his undivided attention to this new departure. Some time later, however, the story was written by Mr. Buchanan himself, and published under the title of “The Shadow of the Sword.”

CHAPTER XIX

AN IMPRESSION, WRITTEN BY R. E. FRANCILLON

I N the year 1874 the *Gentleman's Magazine* began to keep Christmas by bringing out a novel as an extra number. I undertook to supply the novel for 1875, under a somewhat adventurous condition, namely, to work into and harmonise with my plot contributions from other writers, not the least notable of which was to be a poem by Robert Buchanan. Disquieting is a weak description for the state of mind caused by this part of the condition when I began to realise its nature. I had never met the poet outside his poems, and had no reason to suppose that he so much as knew my name. From all I had heard of him, I was filled with dire misgivings that my plot, about which I had taken very special pains—even to climbing down the shaft of a Welsh gold mine in search of accurate sensation—would receive but scant consideration should it fail to coincide with the independent ideas of a poet who (I understood) allowed no middle course between abject submission and a ferocious quarrel. My mental portrait of him was indeed turned into a confused blur when, in answer to some inquiries and cautiously worded suggestions of mine, I received from him, then in Ireland, a more than merely courteous letter—a letter

that I have kept, and give here, not merely for its writer's name's sake, but as a warning against portraits painted by one's own imagination with other people's colours:—

“ROSSPORT LODGE, BELMULLET, CO. MAYO, IRELAND.

“*April 14, 1875.*

“MY DEAR SIR,—I am obliged to you for your kind letter concerning the ‘Legend.’ I see no difficulty just now—if any occurs to me afterwards you shall know—of incorporating in it the elements you suggest; and the Bala Lake Tradition, too, might be utilised. But, in truth, I have hardly yet had leisure to shape the plan definitely. When I do so I will follow your views as far as I can.

“I presume Mr. Gowing has told you that the authorship is to be, and to continue, anonymous, so far as I am concerned. I have undertaken it chiefly with a wish to oblige him and the proprietors of the magazine.

“May I take this opportunity of saying how much I enjoyed your ‘Olympia’—nearly all of which I read in the magazine? Your article on ‘Physiology of Authorship’ entertained me greatly; but in the story I found a charm and freshness very unusual in modern fiction. I hope the ‘Legend’ will be worthy of its ‘setting’ by you; and, believe me, I am

“Very truly yours,

“ROBERT BUCHANAN.

“I will write again when I see the matter a little more clearly.

“R. E. Francillon, Esq.”

The poem arrived at last; but—though the production of an annual was a more leisurely and less

long-beforehand business in 1875 than now—too late for any essential adaptation of the more than half-written story to its requirements in case of need. Anxiously I searched for a sufficient incorporation in it of my suggestions ; alas ! a microscope was wanted for the discovery of an infinitesimal phantom of an allusion to the “Fair Folk” who inhabit the depths of the Lake of Bala ; I do not remember what my other suggestions were, but I do remember that even the microscope failed to find any other. I know exactly how the farmer felt who harnessed Pegasus to his plough, for I was myself that very farmer. In short, the poem had no more visible connection with my story of a Merionethshire mine than—no, not nearly so much—as Monmouth with Maerdon. The skilfullest literary cabinet-maker that ever lived would have been hard put to it to dovetail the poem into the story so as to leave no obvious tokens of his tools. But then—that poem was “The Changeling.” Even its author-in-chief has more than half-forgotten the story of “Streaked with Gold.” But “The Changeling,” with its later introduction, “The Asrai,” lives, and will live—and so there was a connection between story and poem after all. The most natural of all connections : the connection of mortal body and immortal soul. The anonymity of “The Changeling,” never a very close secret, has been of course disposed of by its appearance in the latest edition of its author’s poems.

It was, I suppose, about a year later that I made Buchanan’s personal acquaintance at the house of the then editor of the *Gentleman’s*, the late Richard Gowing. The result was a varyingly frequent intercourse, short of intimacy, but quite close enough for the revision of first impressions by second, and of second

again by third—that is to say, by those which alone are of value. Intimacy is next to impossible without some natural talent for it on both sides—in this case nonexistent on either side—and when, besides, there is mutual consciousness of disagreement concerning nearly every subject on which it is possible to disagree. But its absence makes impressions, if colder, also clearer, especially when stamped by the interest which nobody could fail to take in so marked and so—apparently—complex a personality. I say “apparently,” because the actual simplicity of it, in contrast with its superficial complications, was almost a disappointment when it came to be recognised—just as one is almost more vexed than pleased by the solution of a problem that was difficult only because its difficulty was taken for granted. The right reading of Buchanan was, I am convinced, that his very genius had prevented him from outgrowing, or being able to outgrow, the boyishness of the best sort of boy; while too many of us only too quickly forget what any sort of boyhood means. And the grand note of the best sort of boy is a sincere passion for justice, or rather a consuming indignation against injustice—the two things are not exactly the same. The boy of whatever age can never comprehend the coolness with which the grown-up man of the world has learned to take injustice as part and parcel of the natural order of things, even when himself the sufferer. The grown-up man has learned the sound policy of *not* sending indignation red-hot or white-hot to the post or the press, but of waiting till it is cool enough to insert in a barrel of gunpowder without risk of explosion. But the boy rebels, and, if he be among the great masters of language, hurls it out hot and strong, in the full belief that no honest feelings

could be so weak as to be wounded by any honest words. Of course he was wrong. Complete honesty is perfectly compatible with even abnormal thinness of skin, and with an even exceptionally plentiful crop of corns. He would often have been amazed and shocked could he, to whom hard hitting was so easy, have estimated the effect of his blows. I do not believe Robert Buchanan to have been capable of a malign or vindictive thought; I know that I never heard him utter an unkindly word. I wish, above all else, that those who thought of him as I had thought of him before knowing him could have met him at home—*Strasz-Engel*, *Haus-Teufel* ("Street Angel, House Devil," say the Germans)—not that they have any monopoly of the experience. I have never heard the natural converse of the saying, but it is impossible to think of Buchanan without its suggestion. Of this, however, it is for those who shared his home life to tell in full.

In short, he always gave me the impression of being thrown into a world into which he had never really grown, where he was never at home, but always in a foreign country whose language he could not learn despite all his efforts, and whose manners and customs, despite his desire to adopt them, he could not understand. It was not that, like many mystics, he in his inmost mind regarded life as a sort of dream to be slept through pleasantly or painfully, as the case might be, but not with serious concern. On the contrary, while to the Celtic part of him the unseen life was fully as real as the seen, to another element in him the seen was as real as the unseen. And so the two hostile realities became mixed without becoming fused, so that the ordinary man of ordinary affairs, who knows *this* world (or at least his own

little part of it) very well—who indeed makes this world what it is—found Buchanan exceedingly easy to misunderstand.

On the other hand Buchanan could make neither head nor tail of the intricate complexities of the man of the world. He laboured under a pathetically inveterate belief that every man always means exactly what he says and says exactly all that he means ; that his actions and services are directed to high aims ; that his enthusiasms are as deep and sincere as they are loud. Of course we all know so much better that we never expect the whole truth, and indeed are shocked, when by any chance we meet it, by its naked indecency ; we know how mixed are the best of motives, and how enthusiasms are at the mercy of interest and fashion. But to Buchanan shortcomings and imperfections that we take for granted were—especially when savouring of his two arch-hatreds, cruelty or injustice—heinous crimes demanding the utmost rigour, and vigour, too, of the English tongue. Inevitably he would now and then tilt at some very ordinary windmill because it was not a cathedral, or because it turned about with the wind, or because it ground the poor defenceless corn. And, indeed, to sum up all my impressions in one—the type of the ever youthful spirit, of rebellion against injustice, of mutual misconception by and of the world, of endeavour to bring mysticism into business and romance into action, has long since ceased to bear, in my thoughts, the cadaverous height and the lantern jaws of Don Quixote of Le Mancha. It has assumed the genial presentment of Robert Buchanan.

CHAPTER XX

“THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD,” “GOD AND THE
MAN ”

“THE Shadow of the Sword” was first given to the world as a serial, appearing in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, then under the editorship of the late Mr. Richard Gowing. In arranging for its production Mr. Buchanan wrote as follows :—

“16, UPPER GLOUCESTER PLACE, DORSET SQUARE,
November 19th.”

“DEAR SIR,—Your memorandum is correct, with the exception that you put pounds instead of guineas, and that you introduce as points of legality several mere points of usage and understanding. It is agreed that I write you a story for the magazine, all copyright and re-print rights of which I reserve for the sum of one hundred and eighty guineas, payable in monthly cheques, that this story leads the magazine for at least six months of the twelve; that a half-page advertisement of my poems fronts the story each number, and in the event of your having to displace the story after six months you withdraw the advertisement and return me ten guineas, half the sum allowed for the same. These are the main points. As to delivery of copy I will not be bound rigidly,

but I will do all in my power to let you have what you require, and shall be quite as anxious as you to be well ahead.

"Please get the above loose memoranda put into a proper agreement, and send it to me to sign. The letters would be sufficient, but it would save trouble if you just drew out the agreement in the usual way.

"Yours truly,

"ROBERT BUCHANAN."

The arrangements made, Mr. Buchanan set to work with a will and wrote his monthly instalments with keen pleasure. He had the story very clearly mapped out from start to finish, so that when it came to be written it flowed easily from his pen. His monthly parts were the neatest things I have ever seen written, as they were in a very tiny but perfectly clear hand, on ordinary sheets of note-paper, and almost without an erasure. I fear, however, he was never far ahead with his "copy," the writing of which he invariably postponed till the last possible moment, and this method of his was the cause later on of some trouble. While the story was running in the magazine there occurred a fire on the premises of Messrs. Grant, the publishers, and a good deal of valuable manuscript was destroyed, amongst it the last instalment of the "Shadow of the Sword." As usual this had arrived late, too late for the editor to have had an opportunity of sending a proof, and as Mr. Buchanan himself had kept no copy (there was no typewriting in those days), the only thing to be done was for him to set to work and rewrite the instalment. This he did with such marvellous rapidity that the appearance of the magazine was not delayed by a single day. On the termination of its run the story was issued in book

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form by Messrs. Bentley, and instantly made its mark. “It is a work” (said the *Graphic*) “that no one but a poet could have written,” while the *Nonconformist* declared it to contain “the finest descriptive writing of which any English writer is capable,” and the *Standard*, while regretting that it was not written in verse, said that “even verse could hardly have been sweeter than the delicately cadenced prose in which it is written. . . . Could the prettiest of rhymed stanzas be much prettier than that in which we are told how the two cousins first discovered that their love was not that of brother and sister? We are no blind admirers of the author of the ‘Shadow of the Sword,’ but we are bound to say that in these volumes he has taught a lesson to his brother and sister novelists which we wish they would learn. The lesson is that nothing is more pure and modest than a really strong passion.”

Though the success of the “Shadow of the Sword” was great and instantaneous, it was not until the year 1881 that its author issued his second work of fiction, the success of which was even greater than that of its predecessor. The idea of this story (which was the result of years of thought and preparation) came to him in a very curious way. One night he dreamed that he was on a ship at sea watching two men who were regarding each other with looks of bitter hatred. Suddenly one man sprang upon the other, dragged him to the side of the ship, and leapt with him into the sea. On awaking the poet found himself pondering upon the problems of Love and Hatred. He pictured these two men (evidently bitter enemies) struggling together in the sea, being cast upon a desert island, dwelling together month after month, year after year, until they finally came to know each

other, and so their hatred was turned to love. From this simple nucleus arose the story of "God and the Man."

"In this story" (wrote its author) "I attempt to show that the passion of Hate is like all human passions, composed of the elements of the social atmosphere enveloping it, and easily disintegrated, therefore, when the conditions of moral life are changed. In a hate so abnormal as that between my hero and his enemy, born in the blood, fed and nourished for generations, only a change to conditions equally abnormal could produce the phenomenon of disintegration. This change I procure by placing my two miserable men under circumstances of awful isolation in the polar regions. Left alone together the stronger nurses the weaker, and in those dreadful moments, in the very presence, as it were, of the Supreme Pity, they utter words of mutual forgiveness and are solemnly reconciled.

"The ethical teaching of my work depends in no respect on the living or dying of my villain; its gist is, that when two enemies are once placed by irresistible Fate in a position of mutual sorrow, mutual suffering, mutual sympathy, and finally mutual service—when, in a word, they *see* each other's Souls and are simultaneously conscious of the divine Law of Love reconciling them—Hate becomes impossible once and forever. Once admit that an evil nature can become good for one instant, once admit that Hate is liable to any process of disintegration, and my thesis is established beyond contradiction. That thesis is, stated again, as follows: We hate each other because we do not know each other; the atmosphere of life makes that knowledge too often impossible; but there are certain supreme experi-

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ences which are as potent, almost, as Death itself, to transform the human character. If miraculous conversions are incredible, under any conditions whatever, then—Christianity is a falsehood. If it is impossible for a bad man—a man made bad by ignorance, by jealousy, by tempestuous passion—in short, by the very air he breathes, to become a better man when removed into a higher atmosphere, then I have erred, both as moral teacher and as dramatist. I hold that I have not erred. I hold that if I had asserted the utter impossibility of any redemption or any repentance short of Death and its mystery, I should have preached a philosophy fit only for the Philistines, and have stultified the whole teaching of my life.”

The story of “God and the Man” appeared serially in the pages of the *Day of Rest*. It was issued in book form by Messrs. Chatto and Windus, and later on a cheaper edition was published by Messrs. Strahan & Co., as one of “Strahan’s Books for the People.”

It was, I believe, on the suggestion of Mr. G. R. Sims that the story was ultimately dramatised by Mr. Buchanan, and produced at the Adelphi Theatre under the title of “Stormbeaten.” In this production Mr. Charles Warner played the part of the hero, Christian Christianson, and Mr. J. H. Barnes that of the villain, Richard Orchardson, while the late Miss Amy Roselle, then in the very height of her popularity, gave a most powerful performance of the unhappy Kate.

Into these two novels, “The Shadow of the Sword” and “God and the Man,” Mr. Buchanan, as I have shown, put the very best work of which he was capable. Both were conceived and partly written as

poems, and both remained poems although they were given to the world in prose form. Had things gone well with him he would, in all probability, have continued to give the world of his very best, but after the publication of "God and the Man" he had to face a calamity which would have broken down many a stronger man. His young wife, who had never been strong, was stricken with the cruellest of all diseases, cancer, and for two long years she was slowly dying. He was too poor a man to be able to sit down and nurse his grief, work had to be done, and he did it, though not with the same heart, the same enthusiasm. His great ambition now was to make money, and so he scribbled at fiction in order to attain this end. His output was very great and very rapid, and although his income increased, his position as a novelist declined, many of his later novels were written, as it were, with his left hand, and it is certain that had he been a man of means they would never have been written at all.

CHAPTER XXI

“BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL”

IN his correspondence with Mr. Canton Mr. Buchanan spoke of the work which had so absorbed him to the exclusion of the prose romance. “It is something so alarming, even to myself, that I can’t find words to speak of it. If you can imagine the feelings of Atlas with both earth and heaven on his shoulders, you can have some idea of mine under the pressure of this *opus*. I send you herewith some proofs of the poem, minus the concluding portions, which are not yet back from the printer. I think you will admit its originality whatever you think of its beauty. For my own part, I am conceited enough to think it in some respects the finest conception of this generation!!! There! In reading it, forget—if you remember—anything about the vulgar myths of the Edda. This Balder is my own—his story mine—although he is the Northern Apollo as well as the Northern Christ. I don’t think the poem will be understood at first, but I am sure it will ‘live,’ that the type I have so created will abide; and I will go further and say that it is better (though not greater) to have created a Balder than a Mephistopheles. There’s a farrago of conceit for you.”¹

¹ Letter to Mr. Canton.

While to Mr. Noel he wrote : " I shall be very curious to hear your opinion of a work which I think my most original, and which is pregnant with subtle ideas. Whatever you think of the workmanship, I fancy you will admit the conception to be grandiose and striking in the extreme. This time it is not a poem for the public—it is likely to be caviare to the general. The title is—

" 'BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL : A SONG OF DIVINE DEATH.' "

This poem, which was issued in 1877, did not appeal to the general public. Its sale was limited, despite the fact that it contained perhaps some of the finest work which its author had yet done. It opens with the following exquisite lines addressed to his wife, and it was the last volume of poetry which he published before her death :—

PROEM TO—

A SONG OF A DREAM.

O what is this cry in our burning ears,
 And what is this light on our eyes, dear love?
 The cry is the cry of the rolling years,
 As they break on the sun-rock, far above;
 And the light is the light of that rock of gold
 As it burneth bright in a starry sea;
 And the cry is clearer a hundredfold,
 And the light more bright, when I gaze on thee.
 My weak eyes dazzle beneath that gleam,
 My sad ears deafen to hear that cry:
 I was born in a dream, and I dwell in a dream,
 And I go in a dream to die!

O whose is this hand on my forehead bare,
 And whose are these eyes that look in mine?
 The hand is the Earth's soft hand of air,
 The eyes are the Earth's—thro' tears they shine;

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And the touch of the hand is so soft, so light,
As the ray of the blind orbs blesseth me ;
But the touch is softest, the eyes most bright,
When I sit and smile by the side of thee.
For the mortal Mother's blind eyes beam
With the long-lost love of a life gone by,
On her breast I woke in a beauteous dream,
And I go in a dream to die !

O what are the voices around my way,
And what are these shadows that stir below ?
The voices of waifs in a world astray,
The shadows of souls that come and go.
And I hear and see, and I wonder more,
For their features are fair and strange as mine,
But most I wonder when most I pore
On the passionate peace of this face of thine.
We walk in silence by wood and stream,
Our gaze upturned to the same blue sky :
We move in a dream, and we love in a dream,
And we go in our dream to die !

O what is this music of merry bells,
And what is this laughter across the wold ?
'Tis the mirth of a market that buys and sells,
'Tis the laughter of men that are counting gold.
I walk thro' Cities of silent stone,
And the public places alive I see ;
The wicked flourish, the weary groan,
And I think it real till I turn to thee !
And I smile to answer thine eyes' bright beam,
For I know all's vision that darkens by :
That they buy in a dream, and they sell in a dream,
And they go in a dream to die !

O what are these shapes on their thrones of gold,
And what are those clouds around their feet ?
The shapes are Kings with their hearts clay-cold,
The clouds are armies that ever meet ;
I see the flame of the crimson fire,
I hear the murdered who moan, “ Ah, me ! ”—
My bosom aches with its bitter ire,
And I think it real, till I turn to thee !
And I hear thee whisper, “ These shapes but seem—
They are but visions that flash and fly,
While we move in a dream, and love in a dream,
And go in our dream to die ! ”

O what are these Spirits that o'er us creep,
 And touch our eyelids and drink our breath ?
 The first, with a flower in his hand, is Sleep ;
 The next, with a star on his brow, is Death.
 We fade before them whene'er they come,
 (And never single those spirits be !)
 A little season my lips are dumb,
 But I waken ever, and look for thee.
 Yea, ever each night when the pale stars gleam
 And the mystical Brethren pass me by,
 This cloud of a trance comes across my dream,
 And I seem in my dream to die !

O what is this grass beneath our feet,
 And what are these beautiful underblossoms ?
 The grass is the grass of the churchyard, Sweet,
 The flowers are flowers on the quiet tombs.
 I pluck them softly, and bless the dead,
 Silently o'er them I bend the knee,
 But my tenderest blessing is surely said
 Tho' my tears fall fast, when I turn to thee.
 For our lips are tuned to the same sad theme,
 We think of the loveless dead and sigh ;
 Dark is the shadow across our dream,
 For we go in that dream to die !

O what is this moaning so faint and low,
 And what is this crying from night to morn ?
 The moaning is that of the souls that go,
 The crying is that of the souls new-born.
 The life-sea gathers with stormy calls,
 The wind blows shrilly, the foam flies free.
 The great wave rises, the great wave falls,
 I swim to its height by the side of thee !
 With arms outstretching and throats that scream,
 With faces that flash into foam and fly,
 Our beings break in the light of a dream
 As the great waves gather and die !

O what is this spirit with silvern feet ?
 His bright head wrapped in a saffron veil ?
 Around his raiment our wild arms beat,
 We cling unto them, but faint and fail.
 'Tis the Spirit that sits on the twilight star,
 And soft to the sound of the waves sings he,
 He leads the chaunt from his crystal car,
 And I join in the mystical chaunt with thee,

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And our beings burn with the heavenly theme,
For he sings of wonders beyond the sky,
Of a god-like dream, and of gods in a dream,
Of a dream that cannot die !

O closer creep to this breast of mine ;
We rise, we mingle, we break, dear love !
A space on the crest of the waves we shine,
With light and music and mirth we move ;
Before and behind us (fear not, Sweet !)
Blackens the trough of the surging sea—
A little moment our mouths may meet,
A little moment I cling to thee ;
Onward the wonderful waters stream,
’Tis vain to struggle, ’tis vain to cry—
We wake in a dream, and we ache in a dream,
And we break in a dream, and die !

But who is this other with hair of flame,
With naked feet, and the robe of white ?
A Spirit, too, with a sweeter name,
A softer smile, a serener light.
He wraps us both in a golden cloud,
He thrills our frames with a fire divine,
Our souls are mingled, our hearts beat loud,
My breath and being are blent with thine ;
And the sun-rock flames with a flash supreme,
And the starry waves have a stranger cry—
We climb to the crest of our golden dream,
For we dream that we cannot die !

Aye ! the cry rings loud in our burning ears,
And the light flames bright on our eyes, dear love,
And we know the cry of the rolling years
As they break on the sun-rock far above ;
And we know the light of the rock of gold,
As it burneth bright in a starry sea,
And the glory deepens a thousandfold
As I name the immortal gods and thee !
We shrink together beneath that gleam,
We cling together before that cry :
We were made in a dream, and we fade in a dream,
And if death be a dream, we die !

After the publication of “ Balder the Beautiful ”
Mr. Buchanan’s enthusiasm for Ireland began to

wane. Perhaps he was a little disappointed with the reception accorded to this work, although his hopes for it never ran very high. Be that as it may, the solitude which had hitherto charmed him now grew irksome, and he longed to change his surroundings, at least for a time. "I find the Irish bogs very dull company," he wrote. "The truth is, I have sucked the marrow of Connaught as regards poetical and literary inspiration, and I mean to leave for good in a month or so."¹ The move was made to London. He took a furnished house in the neighbourhood of the Swiss Cottage, and for several years he continued to live in furnished houses in or near London. "When I first visited him," wrote Mr. O'Connor, "he lived in Belsize Park, then I saw him in some country house down Richmond way, and the last time it was in one of those wondrous places in St. John's Wood—the one spot left in London with big gardens and numerous trees, and windows flat with the lawn, true country in the midst of bustling, dirty, choked London."²

It was at this time that he started "a brilliant little newspaper called *Light*," but the journal was short-lived, partly because he did not sufficiently identify himself with it, and partly because it was under-capitalised. So small indeed was the capital with which he started this venture that he found himself a heavy loser when the journal ceased to live.

When the last number of the paper had been issued, and the business arrangements had been wound up, Mr. Buchanan made another trip to Ireland, going this time to Mulranny, by Westport, and plunging into the very midst of the riots. On the day of our arrival Mr. Smith, the land-agent, had

¹ Letter to Mr. Canton.

² *M. A. P.*

been attacked while driving along the Mulranny road, and his son, a youth of nineteen, had leapt from the car and shot his father's assailant dead close to the very door of our Lodge. We arrived in the grey of the evening, and were met by this news and by the information that the body of the would-be assassin lay at the police-barracks, whither it had been removed to await the inquest. We had not been in the Lodge more than an hour when the neighbouring clergyman called ; he had driven over to the village to make inquiries and was on his way home. Hearing of our arrival, and knowing Mr. Buchanan by reputation, he had called to apologise, as it were, for the state of the country. My sister asked him to remain and join us at dinner, which he did, and I noticed that when he removed his overcoat a six-chambered revolver was transferred from it to the pocket of the one which he wore. “ The country will not be safe for some time after this,” he said, “ and it is as well to be prepared for emergencies.”

The days which followed this event were certainly exciting enough—there was the inquest on the body, and later on the trial of the young fellow whose bullet had done such deadly work. He had simply acted in self-defence, and was of course acquitted, but he soon found that Ireland was too small to hold him, and so he sailed with all possible speed for Australia. One or two of the gentlemen who had served on the jury received the usual “ death's-head and cross-bone ” business—that is to say, they were warned and threatened but during our stay none of the threats were carried out. Our visit this time did not last long—not that we were afraid, for us there was nothing to fear, for we were neither landlords nor land-agents ; but the whole atmosphere of the place was depressing—the

spirit of revenge was running riot and death was in the very air we breathed ; so on one fine frosty morning in November we took our leave of Mulranny, drove to Westport and came thence by train and boat to London, where, after a very few weeks, the nature of the malady with which my sister had been attacked declared itself, and we knew she would never be able to take a very long journey again.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DEATH OF HIS WIFE

FROM that time forth the clouds gathered thickly over his home, and so harassed was he by domestic trouble that to do work of any kind was almost an impossibility. In August, 1880, he wrote:—

“ ISLE OF MAN.

“ MY DEAR CANTON,—The details of your letter are very painful to read, and I deeply sympathise with you: the more so, as my own wife is just now dangerously ill with cancer. She has been a great sufferer for some time, and now things have come to a crisis. I am here on some special business, but shall be back again very shortly. We are living at Hampton Wick, a charming spot on the Thames, and I think you might do worse than pay us a visit during your holiday.” And again, a few months later—“I have waited till the last moment hoping I could say ‘Come here’—but my poor wife is worse than ever and it would be a mockery to invite you to a house of sickness. I am so sorry—but you know by sore experience what such illness means. I was very anxious to see you, but the pleasure must be postponed.”

About that time Mr. Buchanan, whose efforts to save

his wife were never ending, heard quite by chance of the life-saving properties of the Missisquoi Spring Water. He had had, I need hardly say, doctors without end, and indeed every quack in the country who professed to cure cancer was brought to her bedside. At times, when she heard of the advent of some new doctor she would refuse to see him, saying wearily, "What is the use? it always ends in the same way—let me die!" but to her husband's piteous appeal of "just to please me" she ever yielded—and so the doctors came and went, their remedies were tried, but ever with the same result. When we heard of the marvellous water she was lying almost at the point of death, and so weak was she that she could scarcely lift her hand. Without loss of time the water was procured—she drank of it, and it seemed as if a miracle was about to be performed. Gradually though very slowly her weakness gave place to ever-increasing strength, and in time she rose from her bed looking like a girl of twenty. After a time she was able to take short drives and walks in Bushey Park, and so in common with us all, came to believe that the dreaded disease had been successfully battled with and that her life had been saved.

As the autumn advanced Mr. Buchanan was counselled by the doctor to leave Hampton Wick, which he averred was becoming every day more and more unhealthy, on account of the decay of the fallen leaves, and so, as my sister was strong enough to undertake the journey, we removed to London and settled down for the winter in a furnished house near Clapham Common. She was still drinking the water and her attacks of pain were becoming less frequent, but though her strength increased up to a certain point, it seemed as if that point could not be passed. Though she went about

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the house as usual, though, when the spring came, she took some walks in Regent Street to look at the gaily bedecked shop windows and to study the fashions—though her bright, rippling laughter was often the gayest of the gay, one could see by the shadows which sometimes darkened her face that all was not well with her—that she *knew*, in fact, but that she would not speak, because she dreaded to shatter the illusions which she had ceased to share.

As spring gave place to summer she longed for a sight of the sea, so we went for the first time to Southend. The details of that journey I recall as vividly as if it had been undertaken but yesterday. There is a long flight of steps at Fenchurch Street Station which leads up to the platform. I remember how eagerly she made for those steps while her husband was at the ticket-office, in order that he might not see how difficult it was for her to mount them. A gentleman coming down as she was going up, paused for a moment and offered her his arm, which was curtly and irritably refused. "Why did he do that?" she asked, turning to me; "I am quite well able—quite strong enough to walk alone!" All these incidents came vividly back to me on June 14, 1901.

At first it seemed that the change for which she had longed would be beneficial to her. The rooms which we occupied were close to the sea, and she was able to go out and sit on the cliffs and bask in the sunshine, but it soon became evident that the attacks of pains which she tried so heroically to hide were sapping her strength away—she was fighting a losing battle, and at length she was cruelly conquered. On June 22nd of that year Mr. Buchanan wrote to Mr. Canton—

"I ought to have thanked you before for reading those proofs, but indeed I have had no time to think of anything (the proofs themselves have now been on my hands a year and are not ready for press). However, I thank you sincerely.

"My poor wife has had a relapse, and is now very ill, so much of our time and thought are spent on her. Her suffering is at times very hard to contemplate, though her courage and patience are very great."

Her walks on the cliff were now discontinued—we took her out once in a Bath-chair, but she cried all the time, and on her return to the house became so hysterical that the experiment was not repeated. Her attacks of pain were now very frequent and very terrible. She refused to have morphia administered, yet I have seen her almost tear the bedclothes in order to prevent herself from shrieking aloud. At such times her great anxiety was to keep her husband from the room, and when I asked her the cause of this she replied, "He is always wanting to do something for me, and I know now that nothing can be done—I want to be left alone." When the attacks passed off she was always very calm and resigned—sometimes indeed her laugh was quite gay—but though she was never *told* that the disease was incurable, she seemed to know by instinct what the end would be, for once I heard her murmur: "It is very hard to have to die, when one is just beginning to live!" In November the end came, and she passed away in her husband's arms, her head resting on his shoulder. A few days later Mr. Buchanan wrote the following to the Hon. Roden Noel:—

"DEAR RODEN.—We have arranged for the funeral to be on *Sunday* at one o'clock. A train reaches

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here at 12.10, leaving Fenchurch Street at 10.35. I do hope this will suit you somehow. I am so anxious for *her* sake. It is asking much and putting you to sad inconvenience, I fear ; but it is the *last* time you can ever prove your kindness to her.

"And Alice? ¹ Of course if the weather is bad she would not go with us—Mary would be the last to have wished it. But to see her *here* will be a comfort, knowing their faithful affection for each other.

"God bless you for your kind words. I see it all as you see it, but ah! so darkly. *If* this parting is only for a time, I see its blessedness—but if, as I dread and fear, it is a parting *forever*, what then? Ah, God, what then?

"With love and thanks to you both. Ever your friend,

"R. B.

"She looks so beautiful in her coffin. I feel as if she were my child too, child and wife; for she had a child's angelic disposition."

In the volume of Mr. Buchanan's Selected Poems, published in 1882, will be found the following—

DEDICATION.

(*To Mary.*)

"Weeping and sorrowing, yet in sure and certain hope of a heavenly resurrection, I place these poor flowers of verse on the grave of my beloved Wife, who, with eyes of truest love and tenderness, watched them growing for more than twenty years.

"ROBERT BUCHANAN, *Southend*, 1882."

¹ The Hon. Mrs. Noel.

The general idea is, I believe, that sorrow softens us—that our own bitter experiences in this world only tend to fill our hearts with a kindlier feeling for our fellow-sufferers. Indeed Mr. Buchanan himself has written that—

“Tears bring forth
The richness of our natures, as the rain
Sweetens the smelling briar.”

All this may be very true in some cases, but that was not *his* experience. After the death of his wife he brooded more than ever on religious questions, which he began to discuss with great bitterness, and that that bitterness remained with him will be seen from the following letter which he addressed to Mr. Noel as late as the year 1894:—

“DEAR RODEN,—With regard to this question of Christianity, I really do think that you are (unconsciously of course) disingenuous—in other words, you are trying to cling on to a Notion which your better reason combats. I can’t take all the points you raise, though I understand them all by sad experience; but I will comment on one or two. You say that as I personally am God, or of God, I should accept Christ’s sonship. I do not accept it, because God within me points out that it was fraught with miraculous pretension. To my mind, Christ did *not* experience the ordinary sufferings of men, if he assumed to be *more* than man. In other words, his Divine claim quite destroys his *power* of suffering or sacrifice. Then again, though I am entirely with you in preferring anthropomorphism to pantheism and can conceive a heavenly Fatherhood, I can’t reconcile a Father who is omnipotent with a Father who is cruel and

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tyrannical. If God is my Father, I claim the right to survey his conduct to me and others, and I often feel, as Mill felt, that the only way to excuse Him is to assume that his power is limited by a greater Power behind him. I cannot respect a process of schooling which postulates endless pain. I have seen my wife die in slow agony of cancer, and I find no mercy *there*. I find, moreover, that I myself, after years of harsh schooling and suffering, am not a whit better than when I was a happy boy—or rather an unhappy one. Men may grow cleverer, but they seldom or never grow better. I am considerably sceptical, therefore, about human progress upward.

“‘Christ, Buddha, Gordon’—children of God! Then equally so all other good fellows, all loving spirits. That thought doesn’t help to make me a Christian. In the sense you mean all are mediators, so why select one for special honour? You say, ‘Because He was the best and highest.’ Not to *me*. There is some ground for believing that he loved men for their own sakes less than Buddha. Moreover, his claim to moral supremacy is, to me, the very proof of his flawed humanity. At all events He has delayed the world’s happiness for eighteen hundred years.

“Finally, I hate the common cant of ‘*loving* God.’ It is a form of gross egoism, and means ‘I love myself and my own feelings and opinions.’ Anthropomorphically I cannot ‘love’ a Father whom I distrust, and when my brethren assure me that everything is right because it *is*, my reason revolts, and the God within me says, ‘accept nothing on such grounds, and distrust any Mediator who offers you any absolute solution of a World riddle.

“Yours always,

“R. B.”

“It all amounts to this : a creed should be judged by its *practical* results, and Christianity has deluged the world with innocent blood purely owing to its loose terminology. Our talk began on this very ground—the looseness of religious definitions. Better to be a pure materialist or an atheist than a nebulous Christian. All the good in Christianity is summed up in the words ‘Love one another ;’ all that is evil in such nebulosities as ‘Give Cæsar what belongs to Cæsar,’ &c., *i.e.*, respect the *status quô* here, and look for results yonder. Scientific religion, on the other hand, says : ‘Clean this world and make it habitable, widen the area of health and joy, prove your love by acts of love, and change the *status quô* whenever it conflicts with human happiness.’ And it adds, ‘The other world, if it exists, can take care of itself ; your plain duty is to make this world beautiful if you can.’”

“R. B.”

CHAPTER XXIII

"THE CITY OF DREAM"

AFTER the death of his wife he wished to remain quietly at Southend, but instead of following his own inclination he listened to the advice of his friends and again took to roaming. After a few months spent in France he returned to London, settling again in a furnished house, and taking from time to time various trips to Southend, which little town had by association become very dear to him. It was during this period of roaming that several of his novels were written, notably, "The Martyrdom of Madeline" (1882), "Annan Water," and "Love me For Ever" (1882), "Foxglove Manor," and the "New Abelard" (1884), "The Master of the Mine," "Matt," and "Stormy Waters" (1885), and he also at that time was turning his attention very seriously to the writing and producing of plays. From his earliest years his tastes had inclined that way since, at the age of fourteen, he wrote a pantomime which was accepted by Mr. Glover, and produced at the Theatre Royal, Glasgow. The pantomime was a great success, and its youthful author received from the management the gift of a gold pencil-case as his reward. In the year 1883 his dramatic version of

"God and the Man" saw the light at the Adelphi Theatre, and this was followed by "Lady Clare" at the Globe. But his connection with the stage was altogether of too important a nature to be disposed of in a few words, and so I propose to deal with it at some length in a subsequent chapter.

For many years he wrote plays in conjunction with Mr. G. R. Sims, and during that time the two made frequent trips to Southend. "On a holiday" (wrote Mr. Sims) "he lived every hour of the day. The long walk never tired him, the long drive never made him sleepy. He would sit far into the night and smoke cigarettes and talk and be up in the morning eager for work or play. Once at Southend we went to bed at three. At half-past eight he was up and ready for a stroll before breakfast. We walked about Southend for an hour. Suddenly my companion left me saying: 'Go back to the hotel, I'll be with you directly.' When he came in I noticed that the knees of his trousers were covered with chalk. He had gone to the graveyard to see the grave of his wife. He had found the gate locked, and had climbed over the wall."

In the year 1884 he made his first and only trip to America. He had a contract to supply a play to Messrs. Shook and Collier, then managers of the Union Square Theatre, New York, but he went without having written it. On his arrival he offered for their acceptance a melodrama which was our joint work, and which has since become popular under the title of "Alone in London." This, however, they refused, and it was produced by Mr. Buchanan himself at the Chestnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia, where it drew crowded houses. At the conclusion of its first run it was taken up by Colonel

Sinn, of Brooklyn, who, besides giving very fine terms, bought all the scenery which had been specially painted for it.

While “Alone in London” was running at the Chestnut Street Theatre Mr. Buchanan made the acquaintance of Walt Whitman, whom he found “in his lonely lodgings in New Jersey—old, worn, weary and weather-beaten.” The two poets drank brackish tea together and feasted on custard pie, for Walt Whitman was simple in his tastes, and he was, moreover, very poor. They parted with a promise to meet again, but the second meeting never came about, for Mr. Buchanan’s health again broke down and he had to hasten his return home. While in New York he was offered and refused the editorship of the *North American Review*, with a salary which was indeed princely.

On his return to England he went again to Southend, taking this time a house which he furnished himself, so resolved was he to make Southend his home. This house, which had already been the home of Sir Richard Cunliffe Owen and Sir Edwin Arnold, was a quaint old country place with extensive gardens and eight acres of meadow, and it was known as “Hamlet Court.”

“I spend the time between this and London” (wrote the poet); “without the stage I think I should go melancholy mad. It is not only a source of profit but of recreation, as I produce and stage-manage my own dramas in every detail. I think moreover there is moral gain in rubbing shoulders with non-literary people. Perhaps I can persuade you to spend a few days here. There is no lovelier spot when the spring becomes a certainty. Just now I am doing the influenza, and your letter

comes with sweet refreshment and memory of old times." ¹

Since then, however, the builder has been busy, and Hamlet Court is no longer what it was. In those days it was a paradise for the poet to dream in, but now the fine old elms which formed the avenue, known as the "Lovers' Walk," have disappeared, and in the eight acres of meadow stands the fashionable Queen's Hotel. There is a station, too, and the little hamlet is now known as Westcliff-on-Sea. It was from there that he issued his poem "The City of Dream," a verse from which is now to be found upon his tomb. In publishing this work Mr. Buchanan had little hope of popularity. "The public don't *want* poetry" (he wrote), "they want pretty verses, short snatches, lyrics got 'twixt sleeping and waking. Just now indeed folk seem to read little beyond shilling dreadfuls and penny papers. Literature will soon be a lost art." ¹ Thus it will be seen that in issuing the "City of Dream" the poet did so in a mood which was more or less despairing. Since his wife's death, in 1881, he had published two volumes of poetry—"Ballads of Life, Love, and Humour" (1882) and "The Earthquake" (1885), and both had met with scant recognition. In all probability "The City of Dream" might have shared the fate of its predecessors, but it happened that the Right Hon. W. E. H. Lecky replied that year at the Royal Academy Banquet to the toast of literature, and in his speech he made the following complimentary allusion to the poem which had just been issued from the press.

"It would be idle" (said Mr. Lecky), "it would be perhaps invidious, for me to mention names, many of which will rise unbidden to your minds; but it is not

¹ Letter to the Hon. Roden Noel.

I think, out of place to remind you, that it is since the doors of the last Academy Exhibition closed that the illustrious historian of the Crimean War has completed that noble historic gallery hung with battle pieces as glowing and as animated, with portraits as vivid, as powerful as any that have adorned these walls. And if it be said that this great master of picturesque English was reared in the traditions of a more artistic age, I would venture to point to a poem which has been but a few weeks in the world but which is destined, if I am not mistaken, to take a prominent place in the literature of its time—a poem which among many other beauties contains pictures of the old Greek mythology that are worthy to compare, even with those with which you, Mr. President, have so often delighted us. I refer to the ‘City of Dream’ by Robert Buchanan (hear, hear). While such works are produced in England, it cannot, I think, be said that the artistic spirit in English literature has very seriously decayed (cheers).”

“DEAR MR. LECKY” (wrote Mr. Buchanan),—“How can I thank you sufficiently for the generous words you spoke concerning me at the Royal Academy Banquet? How can I express my sense of your goodness and your courage? Coming from even a smaller man, such praise would be very grateful; but coming from one whom I have regarded with reverence and admiration, as one of the clearest intellects of the age, to whom I owe inestimable gratitude, it almost overpowers me. And you knew what you were doing—praising a man who is not too much loved, and has met with little sympathy. What can I say further than that the act was worthy of *you*—worthy of one who is intellectually

fearless, and whose noble life has been devoted to truth.

"Some day I should like, if I might be so honoured, to take you by the hand and thank you by word of mouth. Need I say in this connection that your books have long been a precious possession and help to me? Indeed I scarcely know any writer, except yourself and Herbert Spencer, to whom I have yielded perfect acquiescence. Henceforth, when I turn to those pages which I know so well and love so much, I shall feel something more than respectful admiration—a divine thrill of personal sympathy, very precious to a wanderer in the wastes of literature."

"Yours most truly,

"ROBERT BUCHANAN."

After a residence at Hamlet Court which lasted two or three years, the poet removed to a house on the Cliff, which is now known as Byculla House ; then, finding that he was plunging deeper and deeper into stage work, he settled down in Maresfield Gardens, South Hampstead, where he lived for many years.

CHAPTER XXIV

PLAY-WRITING

IT was not till he had passed the forties that Mr. Buchanan obtained any real success upon the stage. From the time of the production of the "Witchfinder" he had never ceased to regard it as a possible means of livelihood, knowing as he did that in this connection far greater prizes were to be obtained than from the mere writing of books, even of novels, but for many years the life he led was not conducive to his being able even to make a bid for theatrical success. The state of his health made it impossible for him to live in London, so he was unable either to familiarise himself with stagecraft or to be in touch with those who might have aided him in this branch of literature. During what may be termed his years of exile, he never ceased to work at play-writing, devoting to it all the time which he could comfortably spare from his other arduous tasks, and thus it may be said, that for ten or fifteen years, he was gradually perfecting himself in the art, from which, in the autumn of his life, he reaped such great rewards.

The first play which he produced after the "Witchfinder" was a little costume comedy in three acts entitled "A Madcap Prince." This piece was staged

in 1875 at the Haymarket Theatre, then under the management of the late J. B. Buckstone. Though it had the advantage of an exceptionally fine cast, which included such names as Mr. and Mrs. Kendal, the late Mr. Buckstone, Mrs. Chippendale, Mr. Howe, and Mrs. Fitzwilliam, and on its initial production scored a distinct success, it never had the slightest chance of a prosperous London run. It was produced at the close of the London season, and was put up as a *bonne bouche*, for the benefit of the manager of the theatre, and though it was announced that the piece would be played by "the Haymarket company during their tour, and would reopen the Haymarket in October," it was never afterwards performed in London. This fact, however, could not be attributed to the non-success of the play, the reception of which was enthusiastic. "Prince Arthur was present, and at the end called Mr. Kendal to his box and congratulated him on the play, which he declared to be one of the best he had ever witnessed." It was, however, taken on tour, and although Mr. Buchanan had some difficulty in obtaining his fees ("I have to issue a writ against Buckstone for what he owes me, confound him!") the piece was phenomenally successful. In Liverpool they "refused money in all the more expensive parts of the House." In Edinburgh it was presented with every possible success, while in Glasgow it attracted "the largest audience seen in the Theatre Royal for a long time. The house was crammed to the door with a fashionable audience, and one important source of the eagerness of the great assembly was the fact that a new comedy was to be produced from the pen of one whose youth was spent in Glasgow, and whose name is now well

known all over the world." The comedy met with a "decidedly brilliant reception from the whole audience, who were hearty and unstinted in their demonstrations of satisfaction. Greatly charmed, they cheered again and again." Yet, as I have said, "A Madcap Prince" did not form the opening attraction at the Haymarket Theatre on the return of the company to London, the principal reason for this, I fancy, being the fact that its author was driven to the necessity of "issuing a writ against Buckstone for the fees."

His next production was a play entitled "Corinne," and again the circumstances were such as to preclude any chance of success. The play was bought by a lady, who, beyond having acted as an amateur, had had little or no experience upon the stage. She took the Lyceum Theatre for a month in the off-season, in order to exploit herself in the leading part, and the result of this experiment was disastrous to everybody concerned. "The lady's acting" (wrote Mr. Buchanan) "was simply *awful*, and a strong acting piece was lost through her incompetence. So far as the literary merits of the play went, the critics were right perhaps—it was merely meant to be a *theatrical* success. Fortunately, I had secured my full money beforehand, or I should have been a heavy loser. As it is, though I have gained nothing in reputation, this very failure has brought me two heavy offers or commissions from London managers, all of whom saw *why* the piece could not run."¹ Though the play failed to draw the public to any great extent, it held the stage during the lady's tenure of the Lyceum Theatre, and later on it was evidently taken on tour, for in a subsequent letter to Mr. Canton Mr. Buchanan

¹ Letter to Mr. Canton.

said : " I see 'Corinne' is to be played in Glasgow. Between ourselves, I am very sorry for it ; for the lady (*entre nous*—don't whisper it abroad) is quite incompetent. It is a play of the French romantic school, and wants perfect acting to do any good."

But so far from daunting him these failures only acted as an incentive to fresh efforts, and his next bid for theatrical success came in the shape of a dramatic version of my first novel, "The Queen of Connaught." There are one or two circumstances in connection with this play which it may be interesting to relate. The book, which was issued anonymously, was received most kindly by the critics, and met with great and instantaneous success. "You will observe with amusement" (wrote Mr. Buchanan) "that all the writers think the author is a 'he.'" This indeed was the case, and in many quarters the book was spoken of as the work of Charles Reade. Fearing the great author's anger, I wrote him a letter of apology, telling him that I was only a beginner in the art which I had adopted under circumstances so auspicious, and finally assuring him that I had had no hand whatever in the circulation of the reports which connected the book with his name. The reply which I received was courteous and kindly in the extreme. Mr. Reade began by congratulating me on the success which I had obtained so early in my career. He urged me not to lose my head over it, or to be too eager to rush into the market with another book. "Rest on your laurels," said he, "and be careful to fill up the teapot before you pour out again." Finally he confessed that the report had not made him angry in the least ; it had, in fact, sent him to the book (he was not a great reader of fiction). But having read this particular work, he



HARRIETT JAY.

could only say he would have been proud to acknowledge it as his own.

Some time later, when I was dining with him at his house in Knightsbridge, our talk reverted to the subject which had been the means of making us personally acquainted, and he showed me a note-book in which he had scribbled the following: “‘Queen of Connaught’—good for a play.” I told him that Mr. Buchanan had had the same idea; that, as a matter of fact, he had sketched the play, and had begun the writing of it, but that so far he had been unable to see in it the makings of a theatrical success. At this Mr. Reade became keenly interested, and was so good as to say that in the event of Mr. Buchanan going on with the work he would be only too pleased to help him with his criticism and advice. I related all this to Mr. Buchanan, who, spurned to fresh efforts, reviewed his notes and returned to the writing of the play. As the work proceeded we went, on Mr. Reade’s invitation, from time to time to Albert Gate, to read him certain scenes and talk over others, and many delightful evenings were so spent. One evening, I remember, while Mr. Buchanan was reading a scene in the last act, the great novelist became so excited that he could not keep in his seat. He paced the floor ejaculating “Good!” “Very powerful!” “Go on, my boy!” and on the conclusion of the reading he rang the bell, announcing, in his most delightful manner, that the act was quite good enough to warrant the opening of a bottle of champagne. The play, on its completion, was accepted by Mr. Henry Neville, and was produced by him at the Olympic Theatre (then under his management), Mr. Neville himself appearing as the hero John Darlington, while the late Ada Cavendish sustained

the part of the Queen of Connaught. Though the piece drew fair business, and could not by any stretch of the imagination be called a failure, it never rose into what may be called a great theatrical success.

Following this came a "Nine Days' Queen," produced for a short run at the Connaught Theatre in 1880, "Lucy Brandon" at the Imperial, and the "Shadow of the Sword" at the Olympic in 1882; but the dramatisation of his novel, "God and the Man," which, as I have said, was produced at the Adelphi Theatre under the title of "Stormbeaten," brought him a far greater monetary reward than he had reaped from all his other dramatic productions put together. The successor to "Stormbeaten" was the version of "Le Maître de Forges," and entitled "Lady Clare." For this production Mr. Buchanan took the Globe Theatre. The play ran for over a hundred nights, and was taken off to a good margin of profit, Mr. Buchanan also receiving considerable sums for it from America. But the play which made the most money was "Alone in London," the very one for which he cared the least; indeed, he could never bring himself to speak of it with anything but contempt. However, it has never failed to make money for everybody connected with it, but the money so earned brought him no satisfaction, for he was always ashamed of the source from which it sprang, and so, taking my consent for granted, he sold the piece for an absurdly small sum to Messrs. Miller and Elliston, and so parted with the goose which laid the golden eggs.

It was during the first provincial tour of "Alone in London" that Mr. Buchanan began a connection which was destined to bring him much pleasure, no

little profit, and considerable reputation as a writer for the stage, for in that year Mr. Thomas Thorne (then the sole manager of the Vaudeville Theatre) read and accepted his comedy of "Sophia." The first performance of this play was a triumph for everybody concerned in it—for the management, the company, and the author. A brilliant representative audience was assembled, and prominent in a private box was Mr., now Sir, Henry Irving, who, directly the comedy began to "move," was liberal both with laughter and applause, and who sent round a cordial "Bravo, Tom!" to Mr. Thorne directly the play was over. The author was called and re-called, and made his bow in the midst of the performers instead of before the curtain. Immediately after the descent of the curtain the stage and the manager's dressing-room were crowded with friends of the management, who came to offer their congratulations, for Mr. Thorne was justly popular in private life as well as with the appreciative public.

"Sophia" had waited exactly ten years for a production, and had been declined with thanks by several leading London managers. Mr. Wilson Barrett, however, had read it some years before, and had written to this effect: "I like it. Will the public stand it?" and had paid a small deposit for the right of doing it within a year. A little later it was almost staged by the late Mr. Edgar Bruce, then managing the Prince of Wales's Theatre in Tottenham Court Road, but the question of the expensive costumes finally decided him against it, and he produced the "Colonel" instead. It had been offered in vain to Mr. Bancroft in England and to Lester Wallack in America—neither thought that it would be successful. As a matter of fact it ran consecutively for over five hundred nights,

or close upon two years, and it has been more than once revived. Towards the end of its run, and after the author had been receiving fees for its performances from the beginning, he sold the acting rights to Mr. Thorne for £600.

The day after production the newspapers were full of enthusiastic notices, one of the warmest and most cordial being from the pen of Mr. Clement Scott and published in the *Daily Telegraph*. Yet, in spite of such encomiums, the fate of "Sophia" hovered in the balance for about a month, so much so indeed that the piece was actually withdrawn for a short time during the heat of the summer. It was not till its revival to open the autumn season that it began the career of prosperity which, as I have said, lasted for nearly two years.

The production of "Sophia" at the Vaudeville was the beginning of a very happy theatrical experience. After it came "Joseph's Sweetheart," the dramatisation of "Joseph Andrews," in which Mr. Thorne appeared as the humorous country parson. This play was produced at the Vaudeville in March, 1888—as usual at an afternoon performance—and on the succeeding night it was placed in the evening bill. Before the comedy began Miss Vane, in the character of Lady Booby, spoke the following prologue :—

"Ladies and gentlemen—behold in me
A wicked dame of the last century,—
Just brought to life again before your gaze,
To hint the fashion of forgotten days,
When Garrick, bent to woo the comic Muse,
Changed his high buskin for soft satin shoes,
And frolicking behind the footlights, showed
Love *à bon ton* and marriage *à la mode* !
La, times are changed indeed since wits and lords
Swagger'd in square-cut, powder'd wigs, and swords !

Picture the age !—a lord was then, I vow,
 A lord indeed (how different from *now*)
 And trembling Virtue hid herself in fear
 Before the naughty ogling of a peer.
 Abductions, scandals, brawls, and dissipation,
 Were rich men's pleasure, poor men's consternation,
 While Fashion, painted, trick'd in fine brocade,
 Turn'd Love to jest, and Life to masquerade !
 Well, 'mid the masquerade, the pinchbeck show,
 When Folly smiled on courtesan and beau,
 Some noble human Spirits still drew breath,
 And proved this world no hideous Dance of Death
 Sad Hogarth's pencil limn'd the souls of men,
 And Fielding wielded his magician's pen !
 Off fell the mask that darken'd and concealed
 Life's face, and Human Nature stood revealed !
 Then rose Sophia at Fielding's conjuration,
 Like Venus from the sea—of affectation.
 Then madcap Tom showed, in his sport and passion,
 A man's a man for a' that, 'spite the fashion.
 Then Parson Adams, type of honest worth,
 Born of the pure embrace of Love and Mirth,
 Smiled in the English sunshine, proving clear
 That one true heart is worth a world's veneer !
 And now our task is in a merry play,
 To summon up that time long past away ;
 To bring to life the manners long outworn,
 The lords, the dames, the maidens all forlorn—
 A *tableau vivant* of the tinsel age
 Immortalised on the great Master's page !
 Hey, Presto ! See, I wave my conjuror's cane !
 The Present fades—the dead Past lives again—
 The clouds of modern care dissolve—to show
 Life *à la mode*, a hundred years ago !”

This comedy, which was in five acts, had a reception quite as enthusiastic as that of its predecessor. Admirably put upon the stage, the scenes of Lady Booby's Boudoir (realising Hogarth's picture in his "Marriage à la Mode") and of Parson Adams's Cottage being wonderfully solid sets for so small a theatre. A new recruit came to the already excellent company in the person of Mr. Cyril Maude, whose foppish *roué*, Lord Fellamar, was admirably conceived and executed.

"Joseph's Sweetheart" ran for over a year, or, speaking literally, for three hundred and fifty odd nights. It was succeeded in 1889 by a practically original comedy from the pen of the same author, entitled "Dr. Cupid"—a fantastic bit of imagination, the scene of which was laid in the eighteenth century. The cast included Winifred Emery, Cyril Maude, Fred Thorne, and Thomas Thorne. The run of "Dr. Cupid" was briefer than that of its predecessors, but it drew excellent houses for over six months.

By this time Mr. Buchanan had succeeded in establishing at the Vaudeville a sort of vogue for costume comedies and dramatisations of masterpieces of English fiction. The difficulty, of course, was to keep the ball rolling—in other words, to find new subjects founded on old masterpieces or imbued with the spirit of old comedy. "Tom Jones" and "Joseph Andrews" were all very well, but where were their successors to come from? "Amelia" was out of the question for many reasons, quite apart from its inferiority as a work of art, and the works of Smollett were at once coarser and more chaotic than those of his mightier contemporary. When the names of Fielding and Smollett were spoken, only Richardson remained among the great masters of eighteenth century fiction, for "Tristram Shandy" was not exactly a story, but a succession of amusing incidents dealing with the surroundings of a hero only just born. While the author was speculating what work he should produce next for the little theatre in the Strand, a French melodrama, founded on a French *feuilleton*, was placed in his hands for adaptation for the English stage. This was "Roger la Honte," better known to English playgoers as Robert Buchanan's famous play, "A Man's Shadow."

The adaptation of this work was not an easy task, for the original was in innumerable acts and episodes, and it had been offered to and refused by nearly all the managers in London, while Mr. Beerbohm Tree, who went to Paris to see the French play, gave it as his opinion that there was not a penny in it. Mr. Buchanan's version, however, was at once accepted by Mr. Tree. Produced at a critical moment for the management of the Haymarket Theatre, it became an enormous success, playing to crowded audiences from early autumn to the following summer, and enabling Mr. Tree to distinguish himself in the dual rôle of the hero and the villain Luversan, the latter a masterly bit of characterisation. Previous to the production of "A Man's Shadow," Mr. Tree had obtained no little success in a play from Mr. Buchanan's pen entitled "Partners"—an adaptation of Daudet's "Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné."

Mr. Buchanan was now in the high tide of success as a popular dramatist, and naturally his hands were very full of work. The triumph of "A Man's Shadow" led to an offer from Messrs. Gatti, asking him to collaborate with Mr. G. R. Sims in a new play for the Adelphi, and in an evil moment he accepted. I do not use this expression to convey the fact that it was in any way derogatory to him to write melodrama for the most melodramatic house in London, especially in combination with a writer so thoroughly strong and human as Mr. Sims; but, in point of fact, he was doing too much, and overloading himself with work, which, at the very best, could only be perfunctory. This the result proved, for during the next three or four years he produced a large quantity of dramatic work of exceedingly mixed quality, and began to grow tired of play-

writing altogether. Up to date, in spite of all his success, he had not obtained the object which made him write for the stage at all—that of securing enough money to enable him to devote the rest of his life to pure literature, more particularly to poetry. He certainly made large sums—sums far greater than any he could possibly have made by the mere writing of books—but with his increased income came increased expenditure, and he soon found that what he earned melted rapidly away. It is a curious fact that, despite his many struggles, he never could master the art of compound addition, so that whatever his income was he always managed to be a little in arrear. He could no more help being prodigal with his great gains than the sun can help shining. I have known him go to Trouville with two hundred pounds in his pocket and return at the end of a week without a penny of it, even although that two hundred pounds happened to be his last, and the spending of it meant that he had to shut himself up in his study and work incessantly till the deficiency could be made good. But it must not be supposed that all his money went in the purchase of mere personal pleasures. His generosity was without parallel, and he never refused a request for help if it was in his power to grant it. If a friend happened to be in “Queer Street” he would lend him a hundred pounds with as little hesitation as he would lend ten, and it was a peculiarity with him that he never looked for the return of such money, no matter how large the sum might be, but always regarded it as so much to the good if it happened to come his way again.

For four years he collaborated with Mr. Sims in plays for the Adelphi. Their first production, “The English Rose,” was a considerable success, and after

it had been running for some time Mr. Buchanan sold out his share in it for two thousand five hundred pounds. Its successor, "The Trumpet Call," was even more popular, but Mr. Buchanan sold out for a lesser sum. Next came the "White Rose"—a costume drama produced in the summer season. This was only moderately successful, in spite of some superb acting. Two other plays followed—"The Lights of Home" and the "Black Domino"—but neither of these equalled their predecessors in popularity.

For the production of the "Trumpet Call" the authors had the assistance of that charming actress Mrs. Patrick Campbell, and the first night was memorable for an incident, or rather for an accident, which might have wrecked the play. Mrs. Campbell played the part of Astrea, a gipsy girl, and in one of the later scenes, that of a low lodging-house, she had to appear in rags. As she crossed the stage the skirt of her dress became loose, and descended slowly towards her knees. A low murmur, deepening to a groan, arose from the audience; but with wonderful presence of mind the actress, quite calm and not in the least disconcerted, gripped the garment with one hand and drew it upward, fixing the spectators at the same time with one long look, a sort of "Peace be still" expression in her great black eyes. The roar of horror changed into a tumultuous roar of applause, and a disaster was averted.

Afterwards, in the "White Rose," Mrs. Campbell played, with extraordinary sweetness and pathos, the part of Cromwell's daughter.

But in turning his attention to the Adelphi Mr. Buchanan was not forgetting his former love, the little Vaudeville. Here, at a *matinée* in March,

1890, was produced "Miss Tomboy," a quite new version of Vanbrugh's "The Relapse," formerly used by Sheridan in the "Trip to Scarborough." It was received with complete enthusiasm, the impersonation of the heroine by Miss Winifred Emery being quite the most perfect thing this versatile actress had done in comedy. In the same year Mr. Buchanan staged at the same theatre his version of Richardson's "Clarissa Harlowe," with Miss Emery as the hapless heroine, Mr. Thalberg as Lovelace, and Mr. Thomas Thorne in a quasi-serious *rôle*—that of Bedford. No play of Mr. Buchanan's ever held an audience under so complete a spell, but the final act was almost too pathetic for the public taste of that moment, especially at a theatre so closely associated with broad comedy.

Meantime, not satisfied with his ventures at the Vaudeville and the Adelphi, he had produced on his own responsibility at the last-named theatre, for a *matinée* performance, a poetical play founded on the story of "Cupid and Psyche," and called the "Bride of Love." It was written in blank verse throughout, and was highly poetical and imaginative, too much so for the English public, who will only tolerate such experiments when they are made the occasion for gorgeous scenery. The scenery at the Adelphi, though correct and adequate, was inexpensive. In this production I myself played the part of Psyche, Miss Letty Lind that of Euphrosyne, Mr. Thalberg that of Eros, Mr. Lionel Rignold that of Zephyr, and the late Miss Ada Cavendish that of Venus Aphrodite. The reception of the "Bride of Love" on its first production was so encouraging that Mr. Buchanan was induced to take the Lyric Theatre and to reproduce the play there for a "regular run." This was a

serious mistake, as he made no attempt to improve the scenery, but trusted to the mere poetry of the piece to draw the public. After his long experience of the stage he ought to have known better.

There is no modern instance, I think, of a poetical play attracting audiences on its own merits apart from the arts of the showman and the tricks of the scene-painter. This experiment cost him some thousands of pounds, nor was he much consoled, I fancy, by the almost daily receipt of letters from unknown admirers congratulating him on the work. One of these letters was so remarkable in the tone of its compliments as to be almost unique. The writer said that he had long ceased to find in the theatre the enjoyment and the interest of his early years; the glamour had all passed away, as he thought, for ever; but in witnessing the "Bride of Love," he said, all the charm and all the glamour had returned, and he felt again the delight and enthusiasm of his boyhood. The signature to this letter was that of the distinguished American dramatist, Bronson Howard.

I may remark in passing that the "Bride of Love" was not a Greek play in the strict sense of the word, but rather a dramatisation of a Greek fairy tale. Whatever its merits as an acting piece might be, it certainly contained passages of real poetry.

Two exquisite choral odes were composed for this play by Sir Alexander Mackenzie and sung by Stedman's choir. Other incidental music, some of it of bewitching beauty, was written by Mr. Walter Slaughter, now so widely known to the public as a musician of the finest gifts. Before passing on to other matters I may mention that on the occasion of the opening of the Glasgow Exhibition in May, 1888, the great representatives of poetry and music

were Robert Buchanan and Sir Alexander (then Mr.) Mackenzie.

"The fine ode which Robert Buchanan had written was worthily set by Mr. Mackenzie, and was worthily sung. . . . No one who heard it will soon forget its noble swelling harmonies, and assuredly few more striking and impressive scenes have been witnessed than when the vast audience stood with bowed heads while the massive strains were pealed out by the organ, orchestra, and chorus. Immediately after the conclusion of the Ode, just as the large assembly was bursting into cheers, the Prince of Wales stepped forward and declared the Exhibition open."¹

Before resigning the tenancy of the Lyric Theatre Mr. Buchanan produced there, under the title of "Sweet Nancy," his dramatisation of Miss Rhoda Broughton's most popular book, and the reception of this play was so favourable that he took the Royalty Theatre in order to continue the "run." Never was a comedy of the kind better played; indeed, Mr. John Hare, witnessing the performance at the Royalty, averred that the acting was the very best he had seen for years. Miss Annie Hughes was inimitable as Nancy, almost equally delightful were the Algy of Mr. H. V. Esmond, and the Tow-Tow of Miss Beatrice Ferrer. Everything was going well and the piece was giving promise of a successful run when Miss Hughes was taken ill and had to resign the leading part. An attempt was made to find a substitute for this delightful *comédienne*, but the only possible one was Miss Norreys, who was not at that time available. Without Miss Hughes "Sweet Nancy" was abso-

¹ *Scotsman*.

lutely worthless, so perfect in its captivation had been her rendering of the character, so the piece was withdrawn, and that was Mr. Buchanan's last experience of theatrical management on his own account and with his own money.

So far, mainly as I have shown through disastrous speculation, his work for the stage had not left him one penny the richer. He grew reckless, and the next few years, from 1890 to 1894, were lived at headlong pace. Never perhaps was a man so busy, so full of affairs, and his marvellous power of rapid writing now became his bane, for besides a succession of plays which were more or less successful, he was contributing a great deal to the Press, and in such leisure as he could find he was putting the finishing touches to his poetical writings. The present chapter, however, is concerned solely with his work for the stage. Among the productions of those years was the "Sixth Commandment," which was a version of Dostoievski's "Crime and Punishment." This play failed to attract the public, but it was noteworthy for two pieces of magnificent acting on the part of Mr. Herbert Waring and of Mr. Lewis Waller. Later on "The Charlatan" was written for Mr. Beer-bohm Tree at the Haymarket Theatre, and although it was most warmly received it just fell short of a great financial success. "Dick Sheridan" was produced at the Comedy Theatre and also met with an adverse fate, and running simultaneously with it, for afternoon performances only, was the "Pied Piper of Hamelin." This little play, which was acknowledged by the Press to be almost perfect of its kind, also failed from some reason or other to draw the public.

I am now approaching the end of this brief sum-

mary of his dramatic work. By this time he was not only far off independence, but heavily in debt. His last stake was a comedy of which he was part author, and for which he engaged the famous Mrs. Langtry, then anxious to return to the stage. Having secured a small financial backing, quite inadequate as the issue proved, he took the Opera Comique, and produced there in June, 1894, the "Society Butterfly," with Mrs. Langtry in the chief female part, and such excellent artistes as Mr. Fred Kerr and the late Miss Rose Leclercq to support the leading lady. All would have gone very well, but for one unfortunate *contretemps*. The fate of the play absolutely depended on a certain dance to be performed by the leading actress at the end of the third act, but at the last moment Mrs. Langtry was unable to do the dance, and some ineffective *tableaux vivants* had to be substituted in a hurry. These *tableaux* provoked a stormy reception and led to very adverse criticisms in the Press. The play, however, ran for some weeks to very fair business, and was actually promising to develop into a popular success when the managerial exchequer was found to be empty. At that moment a creditor served Mr. Buchanan with a petition in bankruptcy. His house of cards collapsed, and a few months later he was standing in the bankruptcy court, a practically ruined man.

Looking back upon that experience, I think now that the man whom I then regarded as his bitterest enemy, since he brought about his financial disaster, was in reality a friend in disguise. For several years he had been living in a fool's paradise, veritably gambling away the best hours of his life. What part had he, who from first to last was a Poet with the deep poetic heart, among the worldlings of

finance? All his thoughts and dreams were of higher and nobler things, and *au fond* all his daily prayer was to escape again into solitude and to be alone with his first love. It was only half a heart he could give to money getting. He awoke from his folly disillusioned, wretched, dispirited, but the punishment he had received was really given to him in mercy, for from that time forth he saw both himself and the world with very different eyes.

CHAPTER XXV

A REMINISCENCE

By George R. Sims

FOR many years it was my privilege to be on terms of intimate friendship with the poet who was my work-fellow in Adelphi melodrama. Now that the collaboration and the companionship are severed for ever I see him when I look backward over the years, not as poet or fellow-worker, but as companion only. And nowhere was Robert Buchanan a more delightful companion than under his own roof. When the work of the day was done, and the "Bard" sat at the supper-table between his mother and his sister-in-law, and entertained his literary friends, it was the best side of the old Bohemia come to life again. When the ladies had retired and the atmosphere became tobacco-laden, the great problems of life would become so enthralling in the course of discussion, that many a night and oft have we risen to say goodbye when the hour was late and lingered on the doorsteps of the house in Maresfield Gardens to "drive home points" until a neighbouring clock had struck the quarter and the half. And sometimes in the summer, when the dawn trod swiftly on the heels of the dark,

we would still linger on after the discussion had been closed ; for it was a cherished idea of the Bard's that from his front doorstep one got a whiff of the distant sea. He would stand sometimes in the early dawn, throw back his massive head, and declare that he was inhaling the Brighton breezes.

I like to think sometimes of the old days, or rather nights, at Merkland ; for the memory of the rugged fighter's love for his mother is a very sweet one. In his home the man who was looked upon by many as a fierce and masterful free-lance was as gentle as a woman. In his work the dominant note was nearly always that of "I am Sir Oracle," but when the pen was thrown aside and he found himself among his fellow-workers, with a cigarette between his lips and John Jameson at his elbow, there was no more modest or less self-assertive man than Robert Buchanan.

I knew him best when he had come to middle age, and it always seemed to me that at a time when most men have "seen the world" the poet-novelist was just beginning to get a glimpse of it. He found himself suddenly introduced to the pleasure-seeking side of it, and his astonishment at some of the "phases" which came under his notice was that of a lad fresh from a cathedral city being taken about town by a London cousin. But if for a time the novelty of his new surroundings attracted him, the poet and student of humanity always got the upper hand at the finish. To his occasional excursions into the land of the modern Corinthians we owe some of the best of the poet's later work.

My last remembrance of the busy man who fought for fame and fortune, who was accorded the former grudgingly, and who won and lost the latter, and

was slowly winning it again when he was struck down by a blow that shattered health and hope for ever, is of a holiday trip we took together to that cockney paradise, Southend-on-Sea. Buchanan had lived at Southend at one time and knew it well. He took me far from the madding holiday crowd and showed me the lovely spots that lay around the district which is the meeting-place of London's mighty river and the sea that has made England great.

It was as we stood in the moonlight looking across the river to Canvey Island that he told me of a strange foreboding. He had a work on which he had been engaged for many years—it was finished, yet he feared to let it see the light. "I believe," he said, "that whenever that poem is published it will be my last effort. I shall never do anything great again." The poem *was* eventually published. The foreboding proved correct. It was the last great work that he gave to the world.

We met but little after that, for our collaboration ceased, and he went to live at a distance. I did not see him in his last illness when the burly form was wasted and the vigorous leonine head was bowed. I was glad that I was spared the pain, for I think of him always as I knew him, vigorous, buoyant, and full of the mellow wine of life, a strong man to admire, a brilliant work-fellow to reverence, a smiling friend to love.

CHAPTER XXVI

ON THE TURF. WRITTEN BY MR. HENRY MURRAY

IT cannot be said that pleasure played any great part in the life of Robert Buchanan, yet at one period of his career he was supposed to have drunk at its fountain pretty deeply. It was at the period of play-writing and play-producing, when he was making money hand over hand, and disposing of it in the same rapid fashion. He was a born gambler, as his father had been before him, and although he was full fifty years of age before he ever saw a race-course, he took to the sport of racing with the same youthful ardour which characterised his pursuit of all that attracted his attention. "We are all gamblers," he used to say. "Man is a gambler by nature and predestination, and life itself is a gamble. The tradesman, the City man, the professional man, the artist, are gamblers alike, and the artist is the biggest of all, for he stakes his brains against the public stupidity, and the odds are heavily against him." Whenever he had a little money he never rested until he had ventured it in some kind of speculation, and, whatever that speculation might be, he never by any chance came off an eventual winner, If he took a theatre he invariably lost by hundreds and sometimes by thousands, and that too on the

very plays which founded the fortunes of others, as, for instance, when he sold "Alone in London" for a mere song, to see it patrol the provinces year in year out, reaping a golden harvest for its lucky purchasers, who confessed that within ten years they had amassed £14,000 clear profit by the transaction.

This untoward luck pursued him in his speculations on the turf, to which he was first introduced by Mr. G. R. Sims during their long collaboration in Adelphi melodrama. The most sanguine of men, he never went to a race meeting without some splendid "certainties" up his sleeve, but, persistent as was his courtship of capricious Fortune, it was seldom that he returned home a penny the richer. It was therefore lucky for him that he was a good loser, and bore alike his losses and the troubles in which they involved him with a wonderfully light heart. He had his moments of depression, of course, and it was during such a moment that he once wrote to Dr. Stodart Walker (in 1893), "It has been a damnable year for me in every way, and at times I've felt quite helpless. 'Tis all very well for me to croak anathemas on the dismal folk, but I'm a dismal, despairing, self-tormenting creature myself, and as for the joy of life, my share of it is a flickering candle. Friday next is my birthday. I shall keep it in the coal cellar, a sheet round me, and ashes on my head. Why the deuce was I ever born?" I should conjecture that this was written one evening on his return from Sandown, after a bad day, but the probability is that next morning he would be up with the lark, brilliant and confident, and ready to try his luck again. His temperament was too sanguine, his spirits too buoyant, for any reverse of fortune to have any lasting effect upon him. Things, he

averred, always righted themselves somehow with a man who kept to work, and that he did with unfailing regularity. The race-course might monopolise his afternoons, but early morning and late night found him at his desk labouring with unfailing fecundity and industry. Nay, he even carried his literary labours on to the turf. At the time when he was preparing a long commentary on Rénan's views regarding certain Scriptural episodes we went together to Sandown, and in an interval between two races I found him standing in the middle of Tattersall's ring, serenely unconscious of the charivari about him, reading his Greek Testament. When the bell rang he slipped the volume into his pocket, marking the place with a tip telegram, and plunged into the fray, apparently greatly refreshed by his studies.

Pleasure taken alone—"bread eaten in secret"—was no pleasure to Robert Buchanan. He loved like Charles Lamb, to taste good flavours "on the palate of others." When he went to a race meeting he drove down with a party of congenial friends to share the contents of his well-provided luncheon basket, and his carriage was invariably surrounded by a sorry-looking crew whose pinched faces, brightened up at sight of him. "Glad to see *you* here, Mr. Buchanan," I've heard again and again from the lips of runner, gipsy, nigger minstrel, and correct-card seller alike. "I've had a bad time lately, sir, I have indeed, and I hope you'll win, sir." Whether he won or lost made little difference; there was always plenty of silver left at the end of the day for the poor helots of the turf.

I don't think I ever saw Buchanan's wonderful equanimity of temper better illustrated than on a certain afternoon at Lingfield. We had gone down

specially to back a certain horse called Theseus, regarding which we had received private and valuable advice from a person whose counsel was well worth listening to. We took our station on the carriage rank, about a quarter of a mile from the ring, and had merely trifling bets on the first three races, reserving our capital for Theseus, who ran in the fourth event on the card. We were desperately anxious to win, for things were going badly at the Opéra Comique, where the ill-starred "Society Butterfly" was running, and Theseus, being an absolute outsider, was certain to start at a long price. We resolved to risk a hundred pounds on him, but, abstracted in our calculations, we failed to notice the flight of time, and, by a cruel freak of bad luck, the horses engaged in the race, instead of parading as usual before the stands and carriages, passed straight to the starting-post by the other end of the oval. We were startled by the roar of the ring—"They're off!" I had the notes in my pocket, and dashed away full pelt for the ring. I had a quarter of a mile to cover, the horses two miles, so the result of my tardy effort may be guessed. As I was nearing the gate of Tattersall's a universal roar of "Theseus! Theseus!" rose on the air, and turning my head I saw little W. Jones, in a brimstone-coloured jacket, all but walking home, with the rest of the field the length of a street behind him. "What price did he start at?" I asked an acquaintance. "Twenty to one!" . . . I don't remember—I don't want to remember—what I said as I walked back to the carriage. Two thousand pounds actually within our grasp, and we had missed it! Buchanan received the news with a laugh. "Better luck next time," he said. "You look bowled over, old man. You'll find some whiskey in the hamper." And half of the

money thus missed would have saved the "Butterfly" from failure, and himself from bankruptcy!

Luck could be kinder on occasion, as it showed in the Cesarewitch of 1893, when Cypria, starting at 66 to 1, ran a dead heat with the favourite, Red Eyes, at 5 to 1. Buchanan, by a happy inspiration, backed both pretty freely, and is indeed historical among the "pencillers" as being the only man in the ring that day who had a penny on Cypria. But such lucky hauls were few and far between, and he found the turf a dear amusement on the whole, though he never wavered in his love for it, or regretted the money it cost him.

CHAPTER XXVII

"THE WANDERING JEW"

WHILE writing plays and books for the market he had never ceased to write poetry to please himself, and to concern himself to an extent which some of his critics thought deplorable with the great social and political questions of the hour. If an ideal poet is one who is completely indifferent to public questions, he was never an ideal poet. First and foremost, he was problem-haunted, the one thing worthy of study in this world being, as he thought, the question of man's destiny and its relation to the mystery of religion. Next he was still soaked through and through with the radicalism of his early days, never having wavered one inch from the conviction that the whole structure of modern society, with its arbitrary divisions between wealth and poverty, was radically wrong. Finally, he was a humanitarian to the core, unable to rest or sleep or possess himself in patience when he heard of a wrong done to or offered by any human soul. The outcome of this, in his busy days, was much newspaper correspondence, which earned for him from Mr. Zangwill the epithet of "Buchanan, the complete letter writer," and from Mrs. Lynn Linton the doubtful compliment, *à propos* of his championship of chivalry towards women,

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that he wrote “sentimental buncum with splendid literary power.” Much of his best work in that way was reprinted in 1891, in a volume entitled “The Coming Terror,” containing much interesting matter, among the rest an attempt to vindicate Herbert Spencer from the attacks of Professor Huxley, *à propos* of the question, “Are men born free and equal?”

On a careful review of the letters which he from time to time contributed to the public Press, I feel glad that he devoted so much of his time to what many would consider thankless work, for on more than one occasion, as in the cases of Mrs. Osborne and Mr. Parnell, he earned the lasting gratitude of those on whose behalf he spoke the needful word. More than one obscure martyr owed something to his intercession, and he saved at least one fellow-creature from death upon the gallows. However, he was still determined to prove himself a poet in the technical sense of the word, so in the winter of 1893 he published “The Wandering Jew.”

This work was commenced in the year 1866, its conception being, as I have said, the direct outcome of the death of his father, to whose memory it was dedicated in the following lines :—

“ Father on Earth, for whom I wept bereaven,
Father more dear than any Father in Heaven,
Flesh of my flesh, heart of this heart of mine,
Still quick, though dead, in me, true son of thine,
I draw the gravecloth from thy dear dead face,
I kiss thee gently sleeping, while I place
This wreath of Song upon thy holy head.

For since I live, I know thou art quick not dead,
And since thou art quick, yet drawest no living breath,
I know, dear Father, that there is Life in Death.

This, too, my Soul hath found—that if there were
No hope in Heaven, the world might well despair,
That thro' the mystery of my hope and love
I reach the Mystery that dwells above. . . .
Father on Earth, still lying calm and blest
After long years of trouble and sad unrest,
Sleep—while the Christ I paint for men to see
Seeketh the Fatherhood I found in thee !”

“The Wandering Jew” was finished and ready for press some years before its publication. The MS. was kept locked in the desk of its author ; it was taken out from time to time, pondered over, then carefully replaced, for it was ever his favourite child. His reason for withholding it from the world was a curious one, inexplicable even to himself, for he was not a superstitious man, and he always laughed at superstition in others, but in some unaccountable way the idea had taken hold of him that with the publication of this work his career would come to an end, and so fixed was this in his mind that he could not shake himself free of it. When he at last resolved to publish the book, he did so in spite of the superstition which still clung to him, and I remember his telling with a curious smile that while he was correcting the last proofs a dog came and howled mournfully under his study windows.

The conception of the poem was a terrible as well as a pathetic one—that of a Christ grown grey and old, despairing and heartbroken, surviving through the ages, and finding at every stage that He is forgotten by the very Churches and denied even the poor tribute of occasional imitation. The poet wandering in the streets of London meets the errant Jew, whom at first he takes for Ahasuerus, but whom he presently discovers to be the Saviour Himself.

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“Lo, now the Moonlight lit his features wan
With spectral beams, and o’er his hoary hair
A halo of brightness fell, and rested there !
And while upon his face mine eyes were bent
In utterness of woeful wonderment,
Into mine ear the strange voice crept once more :
‘Far have I wandered, weary and spirit-sore,
And lo ! wherever I have chanced to be,
All things, save men alone, have pitied me !’

Then—then—even as he spake, forlornly crown’d
By the cold light that wrapt him round and round,
I saw upon his twain hands raised to Heaven
Stigmata bloody as of sharp nails driven
Thro’ the soft palms of mortals crucified !
And swiftly glancing downward I descried
Stigmata bloody on the naked feet
Set feebly on the cold stones of the street—
And moveless in the frosty light he stood
Ev’n as one hanging on the Cross of wood !

Then, like a lone man in the north, to whom
The auroral lights on the world’s edge assume
The likeness of his gods, I seem’d to swoon
To a sick horror ; and the stars and moon
Reel’d wildly o’er me, swift as sparks that blow
Out of a forge ; and the cold stones below
Chattered like teeth ! For lo, at last I knew
The lineaments of that diviner Jew
Who like a Phantom passeth everywhere,
The World’s last hope and bitterest despair,
Deathless, yet dead !—

Unto my knees I sank,
And with an eye glaz’d like the dying’s drank
The wonder of that Presence !

White and tall
And awful grew He in the mystical
Chill air around Him—at His mouth a mist
Made by His frosty breathing—Then I kissed
His frozen raiment-hem, and murmuréd
Adonai ! Master ! Lord of Quick and Dead !’
’Twas more than heart could suffer and still beat—
So with a hollow moan I fainted at His feet !”

In a cutting from an old newspaper I find the following quaint interview. I give it here because

it bears solely with the subject I have now in hand :—

“ ROBERT BUCHANAN INTERVIEWS HIMSELF.

“ The Editor having asked me to interview myself with a view to answering certain questions which might interest his readers, I have endeavoured as delicately as possible to approach my subject. At the moment when the request arrived I was not in the most amiable of tempers, but I gradually yielded to temptation and unbosomed myself to the cross-questioner. The first question suggested by the Editor and put by myself to myself was categorical.

“ *With what object did you write the ‘Wandering Jew?’*

“ Because, I replied, I thought that only one subject remained to the modern singer—that of *fin-de-siècle* Christianity, and because, in my opinion, the legendary Christ of the Gospels was the one immortal spirit which had never been faithfully represented in poetry. All my life I had been haunted by the conception of a worn-out Saviour, snowed over with the sorrow of centuries, old, weary, despairing, yet indignant at the enormities committed in his name. This figure was no fancy to me, but an awful ever-present Reality. I could not believe in his power to save the world or to discover the God of his promise. But I *did* believe in his suffering, in the beauty of his character, in his supremely loving tenderness to human sorrow. No longer the beautiful Good Shepherd of early imagination, he seemed to me sad with the piteous sadness of old age, still haunted by his youthful Dream, but scarcely hoping now that it would ever be realised. I was asked :—

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Did you intend in the poem to satirise the progress of Christianity among the Churches?

“Well, not to satirise—the subject, I think, being too pitiful for satire—but to describe in a succession of vivid pictures how Christianity had been a cloak to cover an infinity of human wickedness; how Churchmen had juggled and cheated and lied in the name of Christ, and forgotten the real sweetness of his humanity. Here I was only to do in verse what the great historians from Gibbon to Lecky had done before me. There was to be nothing in my poem, and there *is* nothing in it, which could not be justified and illustrated by overwhelming historical testimony.

“Why did you omit to describe such things as the cruelty of the Inquisition and the terrors of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew?”

“Because my book was to adumbrate the truth, not to support it by a mere catalogue of horrors. Because I wished to say just enough and no more, to point home the charge on which Jesus Christ was to be arraigned, historically, and condemned. That charge was not to be the gist of my poem; otherwise I should be doing no more than other writers had done before me. What I desired to show was the despair of a supremely loving being who began in divine hope and has ended in apparent failure. not because his moral conceptions were false, but because his supernatural promises have never been verified. ‘Are men *worth* saving?’ Jesus was then to ask himself at the end of eighteen centuries of wasted effort. History, the record of man’s experience, was to supply the answer. Yet my Christ, clinging still to the hope of a heavenly explanation, clinging to that hope as men of his temperament will ever cling to it

was not wholly to despair. Had I made him continue to assert his miraculous pretensions, I should have pleased the so-called Christians. Had I made him admit his utter failure, I should have pleased the Materialists. I desired to please neither.

"Do you believe, then, that Christianity is a failure?"

"Here I referred myself rather irritably to my own letter in a contemporary.

"One journal says you are an Atheist. Is that so, Robert Buchanan?"

"I should not be the least ashamed of that, even if I deserved it. Unfortunately, I am not an Atheist."

"Why unfortunately?"

"Because then the whole question would be easy to me. I should not be lost in wonder at the eternal conflict between Good and Evil.

"Do you believe in another life?"

"Do I believe I breathe and live? Do I believe I came into this world to lose, not to find, my personality? To one who thinks as I do, the question is absurd.

"But that other life was Christ's solution of the problem."

"And it is mine—but it is only a belief, not a certainty, a hope, a faith even, not a reality. The testimony of all Science is against it. The spectacle of human Stupidity, of the colossal selfishness and folly of Humanity, makes the mind despair often as Christ despaired. And even the theory of another life, of an ever-continuing evolution, does not explain the horrible waste and anarchy of Nature."

"Here I took myself severely to task, cornered myself, so to speak, on the subject of my irresolution. There was no escape—I had to answer.

"Come, I said to myself, are you not falling between two stools? You think the failure of Jesus

was his faithfulness to the conception of a personal immortality, of a God and of a heavenly kingdom—you believe centuries have been wasted over dogmas concerning the absolutely Unknowable—you know Herbert Spencer better, and really venerate him more than your Bible (here I winced), and yet you have not the courage to say boldly this world is the only one, and all we can do is to make the best of it! You are not a Christian, you are not a Theist, and yet you absolutely and indignantly reject not merely Atheism, but Pantheism. Your own ‘Flying Dutchman’ indeed was damned by reading the philosophy of Spinoza. What in the name of common sense are you? You reject all known creeds, and offer yourself no new one as a substitute.

“All creeds, I answered, are to me attempts to verify through the intellect what can only be apprehended by the insight. Just as in so far as a creed repels me on the human side, just in so far as it is dogmatic, arrogant, tyrannous over the will, do I cease to follow it. I have absolute, or comparatively absolute, knowledge of only one thing in the Universe—Myself. All beyond myself exists only as phenomena.”

“In that sense, metaphysically speaking, you are God?”

“Just so.”

“God? You,—Robert Buchanan?—who collaborate in Adelphi dramas, write letters to the newspapers, and interview yourself to gratify the whim of an editor and your own self-conceit?”

“At all events, my own nature is the only touchstone by which I can apprehend the malevolence or beneficence of Nature at large. I love (when I am rational) my fellow-men. I sicken at the sight of human suffering. I would, if I were able, abolish all

sin and sorrow. Surveying myself, I am chiefly conscious of one thing—that, without some more ample life than this I live, my functions would be incomplete; I should have existed for no purpose whatever. I yearn for the eternal help and sympathy of those most dear to me. I have held them in my arms as they died; I have been certain, I *am* certain that they cannot be dead at all. Personally, I would not care to live a day longer if I were not to live indefinitely. Personally, again, I have no interest in a God outside of myself whom so many say they “love,” to meet that God I would not care to step one foot beyond the grave! I wish to be reunited to those I have loved, and who have loved me. All Heaven, all hope, all faith, all continuance, is merely an image of my own personality, my own love.

“*We are getting too metaphysical. The Editor wants to know what you meant by those two lines in the dedication of the ‘Wandering Jew’—*

“‘Father on Earth, for whom I wept bereaven,
Father more dear than any Father in Heaven.’

“What I meant is expressed in my previous answer. I meant that it is impossible to *love* what is beyond our comprehension. To love God is to love the mystery of one’s own existence.

“*You appreciate the ties of this world so deeply, yet you suggest in your poem that human beings, after all, may not be worth saving?*

“That is the mood of despair which I have expressed through Jesus in the ‘Wandering Jew.’ Human baseness and, above all, human stupidity, as expressed in history, and corroborated in everyday experience are so appalling, the aims of life are so trivial, the

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business of life is so mechanical! But here and there we catch a gleam of comfort, we come face to face with one of those quasi-divine characters, like Jesus.

“‘Who are the salt of the earth, and without whom
The world would smell like what it is—a Tomb.’

These things restore our faith—at least for a moment.

“*Your faith in what?*

“In Humanity, in the perfectibility of human nature. If we deny that, we take away the basis of all Religion, and become pessimists pure and simple. Pessimism is moral Death, and since the root-idea of modern Christianity is pessimism, or a belief in natural depravity, Christianity is already a dead creed.

“I am sorry for you, Robert Buchanan. Believer and unbeliever, outcast from all camps, enemy to all dogmas, where are you to rest your feet?”

“Here, on the rock of my own personality. If I admit my own baseness I destroy all the godhead in the world. If I lose faith in my own infinite capacities of love and sympathy I abolish the last hope of immortality. If I despise this life, this world, even the flesh and its happiness, I spit in the Fountain of all Grace, I accept everything that is human, I reject all the Christian cant about ‘sin’ and ‘atonement.’ It is because this life at its highest is supremely beautiful and sane that I believe it will continue. I respect my body too much to call myself a Christian, I loathe the phenomena of evil too utterly to admit myself a Pantheist, and I have too little reverence for what I do not understand to think myself a Theist. I might dub myself a Humanist, if that word did not imply some sort of satisfaction with the intellectual

juggleries of Positivism. But I really do not wish to label myself at all. I am content to be in sympathy with all religions just in so far as they respond to my yearning for personal sympathy and love." Here, having had quite enough of myself, I cut short the interview.

The publication of the "Wandering Jew," caused more stir than anything which the poet had given to the world for many years. It was taken up by the clergy and made the text of innumerable sermons both in London and the country, and finally it was made the subject of a most interesting series of letters which appeared in the columns of the *Daily Chronicle* under the heading "Is Christianity Played Out?" The poet, I need hardly say, was responsible for some of the most interesting of these letters, from which, as well as from a few others, it may not be amiss to quote.

"Many thanks for your kindly criticism of my 'Wandering Jew'" (wrote Mr. Buchanan in January 1892). "It is, as you say, 'a queer Carol,' but then life itself is very queer, and among the queerest phenomena of life is literature. Had you spent the whole of your space in fault-finding, I should still have been grateful to you for admitting that the spirit of the thing is absolutely 'reverential'; and I will make bold to add that neither you nor any other reader will ever escape from the memory of the Christ whom I have painted—the patient, long-suffering, ever-misunderstood, eternally-condemned and outcast Christ of the Nineteenth Century. I have simply expressed in a pathetic image what thousands of living men now see and feel, and what, as I have said, they can never forget."

To this Mr. le Gallienne replied: "Mr. Buchanan

makes bold to say that his phantom Christ will haunt us to the end of our days. He might have left others to say so, perhaps, and I, for one, am not so sure of that as Mr. Buchanan. I have, as every fair-minded man must have, a great respect for Mr. Buchanan at his best. ‘The Shadow of the Sword’ is one of my moving memories, lines from ‘Balder the Beautiful’ *do* haunt me. ‘The Vision of the Man Accurst,’ and ‘The Ballad of Judas Iscariot’ must leave lurid tracks on the worst memory. Of the cleverness of ‘The Outcast’ I ventured to offer my humble appreciation at its publication; but the ‘Wandering Jew’ is another matter. It bids higher than any of the poems I have mentioned, and, judged by the only standard it suggests, it seems to me to fall proportionally lower. The fact is that Christ all through is too literally a phantom. Phantoms in art, as on the stage, must have something of the sustaining elements of flesh and blood. The phantom of a phantom will not need to wait for cockcrow to dissolve; and, with all due respect to Mr. Buchanan’s past and possible future achievements, I venture to express my opinion (for whatever, of course, it is worth) that his Christ is such a phantom—mere muslin and limelight, snowed on by paper snow.

“And why? Simply because Mr. Buchanan would not be at the pains to do his work thoroughly, because he did not work and wait and wait and work upon his conception, in many respects as your reviewer says, forceful and picturesque; because, in short, he has ‘no respect whatever for mere art or mere literature.’”

Mr. Buchanan’s reply to this was characteristic: “Mr. Richard le Gallienne now comes forward to reproach me for despising the art by which I live, since,

as he truthfully though somewhat irrelevantly observes, 'Literature is literature' with or without the 'mere.' Yes, sir, and twaddle is twaddle under any circumstances. Before I attempt to justify my words, which only a literary person could misunderstand, let me correct Mr. le Gallienne on a minor point. So far from having been conceived or written hurriedly, so far from having been flung at the public without such care and thought as every serious work imperatively demands, the 'Wandering Jew' was begun and partly written twenty years ago, has been revised and turned over, weighed and sifted times without number, and has only been kept back because I hesitated to commit myself finally to the expression of religious conviction which it contains. Mr. le Gallienne is quite within his right in saying that it is badly written and unworthy of its subject; he travels far beyond his right when he charges me with indifference to the quality of my own work. The labour of a serious writer who knows what he wishes to express, and chooses the form of expression after years of deliberation, surely compares favourably with the labour of the critic who receives a book on Monday, gobbles it up on Tuesday, and then rushes into print to inform the public that it was written on club paper and finished in a hansom cab. . . . Mr. le Gallienne calls the 'Wandering Jew' an Adelphi miracle-play! I wish to heaven it were! I wish that it had been possible so to have presented the theme which I have chosen as to have brought it as closely home to common sense and common perception as the drama which delights the groundlings. For let the literary quality of a so-called Adelphi play be low or high, let its subject be what it may, one thing is demanded of its producers — straightforwardness, clearness, con-

sistency, and honest presentation of an idea for just what it is worth, without embroidery, with all due calling of a spade a spade, with a constant reference to the rule that the creatures presented, however familiar and conventional, have to make themselves clearly understood. To have written an Adelphi miracle-play would have been to have escaped triumphantly from the toils of mere literature, and to have done for the world in one way what Goethe did for it in another. If the crude realism of the ‘Wandering Jew’ reminds my critic of the Adelphi, the cheap naturalism of ‘Faust’ reminds me of the Prince of Wales’s under the Robertsonian *régime*. The story of the young lady who meets a young gentleman, and after a few hours’ acquaintance drugs her only relation and offers up the key of her bed-chamber, is, taken with its after-consequences, an eternal theme for both poet and dramatist, and its success, under adequate treatment, is always certain. ‘Faust’ has succeeded less on account of its splendid literary embroidery than because its subject must always interest the great human public who love the *Family Herald*, and who are never tired of a Personal Devil.

“Who in the world disagrees with Mr. le Gallienne that to make a work of art great, pains and great labour are necessary? But a book’s literary quality should be, like a lady’s virtue, taken for granted, or at any rate not chattered about. When society tells us that a lady is terribly good I am never surprised to find her in the Divorce Court. When the critics tell me that the style of a book is bad, I am always tempted to buy that book. For this reason in my young days I bought Walt Whitman. For this reason I made the acquaintance of Robert Browning.

For this reason, when the critics exclaimed that Tennyson was played out, and was writing without regard to his old 'perfect form,' I began to think that Tennyson was at last freeing himself from the 'clog' of 'beautiful ideas' and from the shadow of Rugby. And in all these cases I was right. Had I been alive at the time when Jeffrey said of Wordsworth's great ode, 'Paulo majora canamus,' that it was utterly stupid and 'unintelligible,' I should have known at once that Wordsworth was writing good poetry—at any rate, such poetry as I wanted. There is no writer of any rank whatsoever who, when all else failed, has not been arraigned on the ground of his literary carelessness or incompetency. Dickens was 'cheap' and 'vulgar,' Thackeray was 'no gentleman' Browning had no 'style,' Whitman was a dirty and unwashed barbarian, Zola could not write a sentence of decent French; and 'all on account of Eliza'—all on account of the literary gentlemen who flutter round the petticoats of the 'merely' literary Muse.

"All this Mr. le Gallienne may say is neither here nor there; he thinks my verses bad, and there's an end. Well, is he not welcome to his opinion? I think no less of him because he has the courage to utter it, and the still mightier courage to aver that he thinks secularism discredited, and to quote the good old literary twaddle about the 'Christ that is to be.' His last question, whether Christianity is indeed effete as a religious system, is far too pregnant to be answered in this letter, though I fancy it expresses the *fons et origo* of Mr. le Gallienne's dissatisfaction. With your permission I will reply to it in a second communication. Here indeed we shall get upon solid ground—there will no longer be any question of style and expression, good or bad. We shall reach the

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crucial problem of Religion itself, far more vital to me, and to all humanity, than any arguments about ‘mere literature.’” . . .

“My poem, ‘The Wandering Jew’ (wrote Mr. Buchanan in another of these letters), “was written to picture, not the nebulous Christ ‘which is to be,’ but the living Christ which *is*, the Divine Anarchist, the revolutionary Dreamer, the Man who was martyred once by His own failure to realise the necessities, the conditions, and the laws of average human nature. He is with us, He is alive, saying as I have made Him say:—

“‘Woe to ye all ! and endless Woe to Me
Who deem’d that I could save Humanity !
My Father knew men better when He sent
His Angel Death to be His instrument
And smite them ever down as with a sword ! . . .
I plough’d the rocks, and cast in rifts of stone
The seeds of Life Divine that ne’er have grown ;
And now the winter of Mine age is here, . . .’

“His mission has failed. No ingenuities of explanation, no juggling with eternal truths can make us believe that He has ‘essentially’ succeeded. His cry to the universe now is ‘Let Me sleep ! Men are not *worth* saving !’ Terrible and awful utterance of a great heart broken ! And wherein then remains the eternal claim of this Man, the very genius of failure, on the tenderness of humanity ? In His humility, His sorrow, His human limitations, His very failure and despair. Do not a thousand hearts cry out to Him with the Magdalen?—

“‘Not for thy godhead did I hold Thee dear,
Not for Thy Father, who hath left thee here
Hopeless, unpitied, homeless, ‘neath the skies,
But for the human love within thine eyes !

And whereso'er thou goest, howsoc'er
Thou fallest, tho' it be to Hell's despair,
I, thy poor handmaid, still will follow thee,
For in thy face is Love's Eternity !'

For this, be sure, is the pathos and pity of it all. He was a man, even as we are men, and He dreamed the same dream. His words have comforted millions of aching hearts, but Christianity, the creed built up in His name, has saved no living soul.

"Let me be explicit. I distinguish absolutely between the character of Jesus and the character of Christianity—in other words, between Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus the Christ. Shorn of all supernatural pretensions, Jesus emerges from the great mass of human beings as an almost perfect type of simplicity, veracity, and natural affection. 'Love one another' was the Alpha and Omega of His teaching, and He carried out the precept through every hour of His too brief life. Then looking round on His fellows, realising the extent of human misery, and perceiving the follies of human existence, He thought: 'Surely there must be some Divine solution to the problem! Surely there must be another and a fairer life to justify a life so ephemeral!' Therein He was right—without some such justification this life of ours is only dust and ashes. But with His insight began His sorrow. He turned from this world as from something in its very nature base and detestable. He conceived the soul as removed altogether from the necessities and privileges of the flesh. He recommended a policy of complete quiescence and stagnation. He affirmed that Heaven was here impossible, because man was imperfect. He dreamed of a Divine Kingdom, where every riddle would be solved, the wicked would cease from troubling, and the weary

would be at rest ; but in so doing He forgot that the Divine Kingdom, if it is to exist at all, must begin where God first localised it—on this planet.

“The whole thesis of my poem, then, is this : that the Spirit of Jesus, surviving on into the present generation, still stands apart from the strife and tumult of the human race, and most of all from Christianity. In my arraignment of Jesus before humanity I have not feared to state the whole case as conceived by men against Him, to chronicle the endless enormities committed in His name. But how blindly, how foolishly my critics have interpreted the inner spirit of my argument, how utterly have they failed to realise that the whole aim of the work is to justify Jesus against the folly, the cruelty, the infamy, the ignorance of the creed upbuilt upon His grave. I show in cipher, as it were, that those who crucified Him once would crucify Him again, were He to return amongst us. I imply that among the first to crucify Him would be the members of His own Church. But nowhere surely do I imply that His soul, in its purely personal elements, in its tender and sympathising humanity, was not the very divinest that ever wore earth about it. He judged men far too gently. He was far too sanguine about human perfectibility, that is all. . . . Well, the dream of Jesus was of God, and so is ours. That it will be realised somehow and somewhere is my living faith. Nothing beautiful or true can perish, and this world would be a charnel house if eternal death were possible.”¹

One of the results of this discussion was to facilitate the sale of the book, which passed very rapidly into several editions. People might disagree with it, but they read it, and this knowledge brought balm to the

¹ *Daily Chronicle*.

soul of its author. One incident in this connection may be worth recording before I close this chapter. The postman left one day a small parcel addressed to the poet, which, on being opened, was thought to be a hoax (though it was not the 1st of April), for the box contained nothing but a few blackened and charred remains. A careful search, however, brought to light a small scrap of printed paper which had been allowed to escape the flames. The poet read, and smiled. An indignant reader had sent him the charred remains of his book, "The Wandering Jew."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAST SHADOW

IT was towards the close of the year 1894 that he had to face the third and greatest sorrow of his life. I say greatest advisedly, for when for the third time the hand of God was laid heavily upon him, he was a broken man—broken both in health and fortune—and was consequently less able to bear the sorrow which weighed him down.

The story of the Last Shadow will perhaps be told most pathetically in his own language. On October 29, 1894, he wrote to Doctor Stodart Walker :—

“ I am very anxious about my mother. For a fortnight past she has been very ill, and about ten days ago I called in Dr. — to see her. He expressed his doubt whether she would ever be about again. A few days ago, in sheer despair, I thought I'd try your old prescription, and it has undoubtedly been of benefit to her. It occurs to me, therefore, that you might be able to suggest something further. Of course you must be in the dark so far away, but you know something of her case. Her present condition is much as when you saw her, only that since the dropsy supervened the asthmatical symptoms have disappeared, and such difficulty as she has in breathing clearly comes from

heart debility. She has very little appetite, and can take no solids.

"I myself believe that the case is not hopeless. Perhaps you could tell me of some expert in this sort of thing whom I could call in. I need not tell you what this means to me—with what despair and grief I write—and if you can do anything I shall be deeply grateful. I think the loss of my mother, coming upon me after so many prior troubles, would about end the life of

"Yours ever,

"R. B."

"Nov. 6th.

"DEAR WALKER,—The end has come with cruel swiftness. My darling Mother passed away at 11 a.m. yesterday.

"God bless you for trying to help her. I am heart-broken.

"ROBERT BUCHANAN."

EXTRACT FROM DIARY.

"At 11 a.m. to-day, after several days of suffering, my beloved mother died, leaving me heart-broken. Worn out with days and nights of watching, I was dazed and stupefied. O mother, mother, if we are never to meet again, the whole universe contains nothing to live for! But we *must*, we shall!"

Nov. 6th.

"In the shadow of death my darling lies at peace—beautiful and holy. Harrie is with me to comfort and help me, and, with God's will, will never leave me this side death."



MARGARET BUCHANAN.
(The Poet's Mother.)

Nov. 8th.

"To-day I took my darling to Southend and laid her in her grave beside poor Polly."

Nov. 10th.

"DEAR WALKER,—Many thanks for your kind letter. I know indeed without any words that you felt for me in my trouble, and she, she was so grateful to you for the relief you had given her. I have laid her to rest at Southend, in a beautiful graveyard by the sea, close to places where she used to be very happy. What I shall do now I hardly know. My wits seem numbed, and my whole grasp of things gone. Sometimes I hardly seem to grieve at all, at others all my desolation comes back like a torrent. I thought on Sunday that my last hour had come.

"In my terrible trial my dear Harriett has proved a blessed comforter. I could not have fought it through without her help. And now, in more ways than one, my darling's death has been fraught with blessing. Friends who had grown bitter against me came back for her sake and gave me their hands. All her influence has been good and holy like herself; there was never such a mother, the world can never match such love.

"I would give everything now for such faith as I once felt. I have none. Christianity especially repels me more than ever. Some time before she died my mother said: 'What kind of a God can it be who permits such suffering all over the earth? Strange the ideas people have of a Providence,' and I feel more and more that the ordinary religious ideas are hateful. A man must accept Christianity all along the line, *i.e.*, miracles and all, or reject it altogether.

And then what is left if we abandon the idea of eternal life, as reason teaches us to do? Only a horrible nightmare—a devil's dream.

“Yours,

“ROBERT BUCHANAN.”

Feb. 22, 1895.

“DEAR WALKER,—I am so sorry you have been ill, and as glad to hear you are all right again. It is see-saw with us all, and I am now myself a little seedy and over-worked. I am hoping to get out of town very soon, for indeed I require a rest.

“Of course I'll send you the ‘Devil's Case,’ and any work of mine which possesses my affection as this does. It is a book which will be torn in pieces, which will be thought by many to be the very acme of human blasphemy; but it is true for all that, and it will live. I had just finished it when my beloved mother died, and for a time I hesitated about publishing it, and I do so now because I am convinced that she would have approved it, for even in her last illness she clearly and penetratingly held to her old eclectic faith. This is the dedication to her, which I transcribe for the first time to you.

DEDICATION.

November, 1894.

While the life blood was spun
From the heart in her breast,
She look'd on her son,
Smiled, and rock'd him to rest. . . .

How swift the hours run
From the east to the west !
Erect stood the son,
And the mother was blest !

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Of all the joys won
Love like his seemed the best,
He was ever her son
Whom she rock'd on the breast !

Yet lo ! all is done !
('Twas, my God, Thy behest)
In his turn the gray son
Rocks the mother to rest !

All is o'er, ere begun ! . . .
O my dearest and best,
Sleep in peace ! till thy son
Creepeth down to thy breast !

“ The book itself ends with a new verse edition of the Litany which will sadden the scribes and pharisees of modern Christianity. Thanks for the lecture, and for the kind allusion to your friend. It touched me greatly, for I saw in it a fresh proof of your affection.

“ I hope the Professor is mending a little—the milder weather, which seems approaching, should help him. Give my affectionate regards to him and to Mrs. Blackie, who is well I trust, and believe me,

“ Always yours,

“ ROBERT BUCHANAN.”

While the wound caused by his mother's death was still open he wrote the following, which I give just as I found it pinned to the pages of his diary. In judging it I trust the reader will remember that it was written at a time when he was not in his normal condition, that it came as it were from a despairing, broken heart, but it possesses a peculiar interest because it deals with the problem over which he pondered all his life.

“ In an article by the late Professor Clifford, entitled ‘ Virchow on the Teaching of Science,’ and published

in the *Nineteenth Century*, there is a very remarkable passage concerning the expediency of promulgating unproved doctrines, and especially the doctrine of personal immortality. Professor Clifford was not the sort of teacher from whom a thoughtful man could learn much—he was far too rectangular and dogmatic a thinker, but here, as on several other occasions, he touched the very quick of truth. After pointing out the necessity of caution in teaching the doctrine of another life to the young, he asks the reader carefully to consider two things. The first thing is, that by teaching the doctrine too early we weaken its effect. ‘Teach your children,’ he said, ‘to do good and to eschew evil; if in later life they can find hope of an eternity of such action, it will make them happier, and may make them better.’ The next thing to be considered (and it is the only one of the two worth serious thought at all, the other being a disingenuous mode of suggesting ‘don’t teach religion at all’) is ‘the frightful loss and disappointment you prepare for your child if, as is possible in these days, he becomes convinced later on that the doctrine is founded on insufficient evidence.’ It is not merely that you have brought him up as a prince to find himself a pauper at eighteen, he may have allowed this doctrine to get inextricably mixed with his notions of right and wrong. Then the overthrow of one will, at least for a time, endanger the other. You leave him the sad task of gathering together the wrecks of a life broken by disappointment, and wondering whether honour itself is left to him among them. Leave him free of this doctrine, and his conscience will rest upon its true base, safe against all storms, for it is built upon a rock. Then he can never reproach you with having raised hopes in him which knowledge is fated to blast,

and with them, it may be, to blast the promise of his life.

"These are terrible words—terrible because they are absolutely true. The loss of a belief in the permanence of human personality, to a man who has once entertained that belief, may be worse than disillusion—it may be the very apocalypse of moral despair. To some men, of course, the loss may mean little or nothing, they have held their faith too lightly, too indifferently, to murmur much over its departure. But to the majority of men, and to all men of great capacities of love, the awakening must be awful, full of horror too deep for words.

"Well, that experience has in a sense been mine. It has been lessened for only one reason, that it is even as yet incomplete; that I do not, even now, quite believe the inexorable voice which, having spoken the word of promise to the ear, has broken it to the Soul. On every side of me, this almost absolute darkness, with hardly a gleam of hope or light; behind me, the gate of that lost Paradise; before me the inevitable end of all. My faith has not quite forsaken me, but so far from being upon a rock, it is fixed on ever-shifting sands.

"It is time, I think, that a grown man, a man who all his life fought on the side of the gods, should open his heart out fully on this subject, narrate his experience, honestly avow his condition. Candour is not in fashion, honesty will never be in fashion; men lie, and lie, and lie, often from the best of motives, sometimes from the meanest, but now as yesterday Hume's statement is true, that no prudent man speaks openly of his real religion. I do not claim to be a prudent man; I know, long experience has taught me, that I am a very imprudent one. But I am, by

temperament, by early education, by long habit, a believer in things supernatural, and I have been many years, even more surely than Spinoza, 'God intoxicated.' All my wish, all my prayer, all my endeavour, has been to believe certain things—and I have failed to do so.

"The doctrine of immortality was not taught me at home when I was a child. My father was a Socialist, my mother the daughter of a solicitor in Staffordshire, with strongly heterodox views. I first heard the name of God at a boarding-school near London, where I was sent at a very early age. From that moment I imbibed the natural superstition; it became part of the air I breathed. For many years I believed as others do, and was happy enough. Then, year after year, my belief lessened, and my ideas changed. But it was not until I was nearly fifty years of age that I rejected altogether the sacrificial ideas of Christianity, then Christianity itself and finally many of the ordinary articles of natural religion. All that time I suffered no little pain, parting one by one with my cherished hallucinations. I am not sorry however, that I once cherished them. I am glad that I did not found myself at the first on Professor Clifford's rock. I have never found that the gain of any living truth involved any sacrifice of honour.

"I know of course, the easy answer to all this, ready in a thousand mouths, utterable from countless newspapers and pulpits. I know how the lispng Christian must scorn me, and how the honest Christian will pity me. I shall be denounced again, as I have often been, as an unbeliever, an atheist—as if unbelief or atheism were crimes, as if any honest opinion was an outrage! How many of those who

answer me thus have been pondering the subject for fifty years, honestly endeavouring, with all the zeal of heart and soul, to believe? If I have failed to believe, it is because, with every temptation to self-deception, I have never closed my eyes when seeking for the light.

"Here then is my conclusion on the subject which to my thinking is the one of paramount importance to human beings. It is a conclusion, remember, framed at a time when my temperament is as ardent, my spiritual vision as clear, my desire to believe as overmastering as when I was a happy, credulous child. Well, the belief in personal immortality, in the survival of the Soul after death, is, as a matter of practical reason, wholly untenable. Every proven fact of Nature is against it. It has no kind of corroboration in knowledge, in phenomena, in experience. The arguments brought to support it would, if advanced in favour of any less eagerly desired conclusion, be rejected with contemptuous laughter.

"I put aside as irrelevant, of course, all that is advanced in the way of what is called 'revelation,' for to me there is no revelation in any statement which conflicts with personal knowledge of the world I live in. I am certain that miracles never happened, and never will happen; I am as certain of that as I am that I live, and that I shall die. How, then, can I get any help from creeds which are based on the idea of miracles, and of that utterest miracle of all, the personal Incarnation of a Jewish peasant, of an unknown and unknowable God?

"The belief in another life is, then, more than an unproved doctrine—it is a doctrine at variance with all human and natural phenomena, a doctrine

maintained against overbalancing evidence on the other side. If maintained at all it can only be in the region of metaphysics, not that of empirical reason. Stated briefly, the only possible argument in favour of immortality is the negative argument that human life is black as a drunkard's dream without it. This is Keats's assumption.

"Many able men, of course, like Professor Clifford, maintain the contrary. The Materialist and the Positivist alike aver that the world, even for men who have to die, is an excellent world, and that it is sheer sentiment to whine over the inevitable. My present purpose, however, is not to deal with the feelings of others, but with my own. I am quite sure that I am a believer by temperament, just as other men are by temperament unbelievers, and that Professor Clifford's 'rock,' had I reached it in early life, would never have appeased *my* longings. To me, therefore, that one argument for another life is still valid. When it becomes invalid to me, I shall resign the hope of immortality altogether. I thank God, however, it has not become so.

"At the same time I have looked Death in the face, and realised that the belief I cling to, against all practical reason, is naturally untenable. Let me record as fully as I dare, when every word is a rending of the heartstrings, a personal experience.

"Among all the troubles and vicissitudes of a somewhat stormy life, one crowning blessing was given to me, that of a love so supreme, a sympathy so complete, that I sometimes feel as if it must have been exceptional. For many years one light, one consolation had never failed me. Whatever my sins had been, whatever my follies (and they were many), I was sure of the light on one dear face, and to that,

both in despair and happiness, I ever turned. A time of worldly trouble came, I was struck down by personal calamity ; I lay like a beaten slave in the arena amid execrations from every side. Well, it did not matter ; the one light was with me still, the one voice still said, ' God bless you—all is well.' Now, the sainted soul of whom I write had been educated, like myself, in complete religious infidelity, a fact which did not prevent her from being loving, large-minded, compassionate to all created things ; but she too, like myself, kept in her heart a faith, a hope, which she seldom or never uttered—faith in the power of an all-loving and all-merciful God.

" Suddenly, almost unexpectedly the end came, or the beginning of the end, and I was sitting by the bedside of her I loved, with the shadow of Death upon us both. I will not speak of those sufferings, those cruel and inexplicable tortures which it was my doom to witness ; they were too horrible to behold, too ghastly to remember. My sleepless nights were divided between wild and despairing attempts to retain the departing life, and by mad appeals to God for mercy, for a little respite, for a few hours more of love. Once as I sat there in the night I heard the dear lips murmur thus : ' What strange ideas men have of God ! What kind of a God must it be that causes His creatures so much pain ? ' Then one evening, when I had thrown myself down to snatch a few minutes' rest, I was called, and from the sick-bed came this last appeal, in tones so faint with agony as to be almost inaudible : ' Don't keep me here ! I *want* to go ! ' And after that we refrained from trying to draw back the dear fluttering life, and at last, Nature being unable to bear the load of pain any longer, the spirit passed away. What followed

must be familiar to all who have loved and lost : the horrible stony change from life to nothingness, from beauty to horror ; the hideous accompaniments of hideous Death ; the pain and despair, the terror, the desolation, the cry for help that has never come, the prayer for belief that is seldom if ever granted. The grave opened and closed and all was done.

“ Again and again during my life I had dwelt with death and sorrow—they were no new guests in my desolate house ; but they had never till that hour come in forms so terrible, so fatal to all hope. Now mark what followed. The orthodox believer will frown or smile at it, while the materialist will shrug his shoulders. Sitting by the death-bed of one who was dearer to me than my own life, I said to myself : ‘ I am not insane enough to ask God for any sign out of the way of Nature, but I will accept any token, however faint, as crowning proof that we must meet again. If, for example, when I fall to sleep she comes to me even in *dreams*, I will believe. Of one thing I am certain, that if her spirit still survives, and if any disembodied spirit can communicate with those it loves, her spirit will communicate with me ; for I to her, as she to me, am all the world, all happiness, all life, all being.’ That was my foolish feeling. How was it answered ? When I managed to get a little rest my consciousness was a dead blank. Night after night, though every night I knelt by the beloved dead and prayed for a token which never came, my dreams were empty of that one dear face. From that hour to this, though from the dawn of every day to the coming of every night my thoughts are full of the love that I have lost, the beloved spirit has never come back to me even in the dimmest dream.

"I shall be told, nay, I have been told, that this is God's way of punishing me for my want of 'faith.' But it is borne in upon me, as upon so many others, that the experience of which I have spoken, *i.e.*, the absolute absence, even in moments of great suffering and insight of any assurance, however faint, of the survival of personality after death, is quite in harmony with what we know of the physical basis of mind and quite out of harmony with our unverified dream of another life. God grants no signs, offers no corroborations. No spirit comes to tell us of the unknown world, no dead man has ever slipped his shroud. Every circumstance connected with the awful phenomenon of Death points to the total extinction of the living personality, or Soul.

"In the face of all this we are assured that miracles of corroboration were done *once* to give us assurance that we should believe, and that God, having once proclaimed His secret to a small group of believers, will never unveil His face again. We hear a great deal moreover of the *beauty* of Death, of the divine glimpses given at deathbeds, of the dim, pathetic intimations received during the last moments of those we love. Well, that is not *my* experience. I have been again and again face to face with Death, and I have never found it beautiful, have never had one of those divine glimpses or pathetic intimations. All my remembrance of Death is, that it is, when it comes, invariably hideous, horrible, hopeless, and awful. In our pitiful despair we try to flatter the hateful grinning face, and to cheat ourselves into some kind of blind faith in divine beneficence. But Death is hideous, and every assurance that it gives corroborates the scientific view of the evanescence of individual life.

“Feeling this, realising this, why have I not the courage to admit to myself that Death is the inevitable end of all consciousness, and the dream of another life is simply a mirage certain to fade away? Cardinal Newman himself admitted with a sigh that Nature as we know it gave no indication whatever of divine goodness or beneficence, and that to believe in God at all, blind faith was necessary. I have no such faith ; but I retain my hope, simply and solely because without it life is unexplainable. If this is the only life we are to know, there is certainly no God, and if there is no God, life is certainly, as I have said, a mere drunkard’s dream. This, I must repeat, is merely my personal impression. Other men are content to accept the world and its fleeting joys and sorrows, and to ask no more, at least they say so and I must believe them.

“We postulate another life, therefore, because this life is incomplete and horrible without it ; but when all is said and done the belief remains unverified, even contradicted, daily by practical experience. It is a nebulous hope, not a belief at all. As a hope it helps and strengthens us ; as a fixed belief, connected with any possible dogma, it would continue to do infinite harm as it had done in the past.”

CHAPTER XXIX

CLOSING SCENES

FROM the blow of his mother's death he never really recovered, and though he returned to his work it was not with the same heart, the same enthusiasm. It was at this time (1895) that he carried out an idea over which he had pondered for some time, that of becoming his own publisher. In this way he issued his last two volumes of poetry, "The Devil's Case" and "The Ballad of Mary the Mother," but the experiment was not successful, and he tired of it almost as soon as it had been begun, indeed so little interested was he in this new departure that his stories "Effie Hetherington," "Marriage by Capture," and "Diana's Hunting" were at that very time sold to and issued by Mr. Fisher Unwin. In conjunction with myself he wrote a couple of plays, "The Strange Adventures of Miss Brown," produced by Mr. Frederick Kerr at the Vaudeville Theatre, and the "Shopwalker," produced by Mr. Weedon Grossmith also at the Vaudeville; and his last dramatic production was a version of "Les Demoiselles de St. Cyr," and entitled, "Two Little Maids from School." This adaptation, which was also our joint work, was produced for a trial trip at the Metropole Theatre, Camberwell. It was staged

under his sole direction, and at his own expense, and was successfully produced on November 21, 1898, the whole performance being creditable to every one concerned in it. He was determined to do it well, and to that end he spared no expense. The dresses, supplied by Mrs. May, were sumptuous, and new scenery was painted by the late Mr. Hall. The company, too, was most efficient, and Miss Annie Hughes, by her finished performance of Louise, took Camberwell by storm.

The expense of new scenery, new dresses, new music, &c., being particularly heavy, it was a foregone conclusion that, as the play was to be performed for one week only, its author-manager could not come out a gainer. As a matter of fact, however, his loss was not great, and so delighted was he with the result of his experiment, that he determined to reproduce the piece in the spring for a run at a West End theatre. But the play in question has never since seen the light, for in the spring Robert Buchanan had been stricken down by the illness which ultimately caused his death.

At the time of the production of "Two Little Maids from School" his health, which had been indifferent for some time, seemed to have become entirely re-established, for in looking over his diaries I find the following entry made about a week after the play had been withdrawn from representation.

"During the last few weeks I have felt particularly well, better than I have done for months. I was able to attend all the rehearsals of 'Two Little Maids,' which were more than usually arduous, without experiencing much fatigue. Intellectually, too, I feel stronger, more fitted for the work I want and mean to do, if I can keep in tolerably good form."

During that Christmastide he was particularly jolly and particularly happy. We filled the house with guests, and he was the life and soul of the party, and when the holidays were over he seemed to be all the better for the fun and festivity, and was eager to take up his work again. On the morning of January 5 1899, he was going on some business to town, and I was preparing to accompany him, when he strolled into the dining-room and asked the maid to give him some whiskey, remarking that he felt the morning very cold. She was about to comply with his request when she was startled by a wild cry of "O my God!" Looking up she saw that his face had become ghastly white, that the expression of it was agonised, and that he was pressing his left hand to his heart. It needed but a moment to summon me to his side, and by that time the perspiration was rolling down his face and dripping from his hair. When we succeeded in getting him to his room we tried every remedy conceivable to alleviate the pain, but it was all of no avail. Thus he remained till the arrival of the doctor, when he gained relief from an injection of morphia.

The illness which followed this attack lasted several weeks, and though at the end of that time the patient seemed to get better, he could not get well. He was subject to intermittent attacks of pain which were more or less severe, and which were only alleviated by injections of morphia. The doctors advised a change and we went to Brighton. From there he wrote to Dr. Harry Campbell: "Thanks for your kind letter. The day after being weighed at the chemist's and scaling 16st. 8lbs., I went on the pier and weighed myself on one of the automatic things, scaling exactly 15st. 8lbs., so that I am losing *a stone a day*, and at

the end of a week shall weigh about 8st. odd and be able to ride in flat races! Are you satisfied? I still keep very seedy and shan't stay here long if I don't improve.

"Your remarks about the 'New Rome' are very kind. The book has been more or less boycotted, owing to its non-patriotic character. Depend upon it, it is a mistake to have any ideas of one's own on any possible subject. The only way to thrive is to shout with the crowd, and alas! I can't do it. I maun 'gang my ain gait,' and be content with the esteem of the fit and few."

We remained in Brighton for about a fortnight, then, as his health showed no sign of improvement, and as his pulse kept alarmingly high, we returned home. We arrived at Clapham on a bitterly cold day at the end of February, and found the air thick with fog and the Common covered with snow. A few days later he was stricken with influenza, which was quickly followed by double pneumonia. When the violence of this second attack had passed away, and while he was still confined to his bed, he managed, with no little difficulty, to write the following :—

"To the Right Hon. W. E. H. Lecky.

"DEAR MR. LECKY,—I am at last able to sit up and write a few letters, and my first impulse is to send you my affectionate thanks for your great sympathy and kindness to me at a time when I was so helpless. It is good to think that there are such men as you among us, to brighten the not too abundant sunshine.

"I have never had so long an illness, or one in which I was so completely incapable of thought of

any kind. I suppose it was *fundamentally* influenza, but if so, Influenza is a frightful thing. The doctors gave me up just before Broadbent was called, but when he came I had taken a turn for the better.

"I shall not be equal to much for some time, I fancy, but God willing, I shall soon put everything right again.

"With thanks and thanks again for all your sympathy,

"Believe me, always yours,

"ROBERT BUCHANAN."

As this last attack passed off I noticed a great change in him. A restlessness had seized him, he could not settle for any time either to read or write. His pulse was constantly intermittent, and was never lower than ninety. About the beginning of June we again left town, going this time to a small furnished house in Pevensy Bay. The house was not very comfortable, and it was, moreover, somewhat depressing, but the quiet and perfect unconventionality of the little spot suited him so well that he resolved to remain. At this time he learned by some means that the first attack had been one of angina pectoris, and he wrote to Dr. Harry Campbell: "I shall be in London this week, from to-morrow till about Friday, when we return to another house *here*. Should like to see you when in town. Have had a very good time on the whole, bathed about eight or nine times, and been much out of doors. I want to find out once for all if that *angina* attack is bound to *return*, or whether there is any chance of escape from it? You have not been quite frank with me about it, I'm afraid! I shall cross-examine you when we meet, and you won't be able to hoodwink me on the subject."

During that visit to town his fears were partially allayed, and he returned to the second house in better spirits than he had been for some time. We remained at Pevensey Bay till the second week in October, and had a very happy time there. The roads were good, and he took up his cycling with relish, and he equally enjoyed his dips in the sea. We made one or two excursions to Bexhill, visiting together the places which we had known so many years before ; we put up a tent on the shore and spent most of our time in the open air, taking our meals in the tent even on wet days. We had a succession of visitors, and only a few hundred yards from our front door stood the house occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Walter Slaughter, both jovial and most delightful companions. They, too, had their visitors, and we formed a little colony in ourselves. We all cycled, we all played cricket, we all enjoyed to the full the sunny blue skies and the rippling waves of the sea, and it seemed to me that Mr. Buchanan was laying in a stock of health which would last him for many years.

It was about this time that his attention was called to a book which dealt with the cure of heart disease by means of the Nauheim Baths, and on our return to town he consulted the author of the work in question and was advised by him to undergo a course of treatment. It was not the season to go to Nauheim, but he was assured that certain ingredients could be used and the baths taken quite as effectively at home. Two courses were open to him—he could either remain in London, or he could go to Hastings and place himself under the care of a local doctor and a nurse, the special attention of both a doctor and a nurse being necessary, as the patient while undergoing the treatment required to be very care-

fully watched. Mr. Buchanan chose to adopt the latter course. We arrived at Hastings during the first week in December, and a few days after our arrival the first bath was taken ; after the second bath the patient was prostrated by a severe stomach attack, and so for a time they were discontinued, and he took to his bed, passing his Christmas Day in the endurance of much pain. The attack, however, passed off, leaving him little, if any, the worse for it—indeed, between Christmas Day and New Year's Day he was sufficiently recovered to write the following article, which appeared in the *Sunday Special*. I give it in its entirety, because, being almost the last thing he wrote, it will have become invested with special interest to the public.

“THE END OF THE CENTURY.

“Sitting apart by the troubled waters of the Sea, close to the Eve of the last Year of a wonderful Century, I, the writer of these leaves, am conscious of three great Personalities, with each of whom I have had more or less personal communication. Of the first I wrote only a few days ago in these columns, to the second I carried my affection and my homage, somewhat over a decade ago, in America ; the third is still with us in England, flashing the light of his inspiration far away into the Age to come. All three, I fear, have been Dreamers, staking their eternal salvation on ideas which are still more or less indifferent to our latter-day Civilisation ; all three represent what is visionary rather than what is fixed and real ; yet the influence of all three is potent still, in spite of the World's forgetfulness, indifference, or neglect. The first represents Fairyland, the second

Democracy, the third Philosophy; and strange to say all three words, like all three men, possess a meaning which is interchangeable; for when the hope of Democracy is realised, the prophecy of Philosophy will be fulfilled, and finally we shall discover that the World is Fairyland after all!

“‘The World knows little of its wisest men.’ On my arrival in the United States some twelve years ago, I discovered to my amazement that the one great poet whom America had produced, the one man whose electric thought had travelled into Europe to illuminate the Eastern mind, was practically non-existent to the popular or Bostonian intelligence, while innumerable men of straw (or snow, or mud, or plaster) were set up in every literary market-place and photographed in every magazine. ‘Where are your gods, O Americans?’ I demanded; and, ‘Look round,’ they answered, ‘they are here!’ I looked around and I beheld them: divers deft man-milliners and drapers, busy in the manufacture of European underclothing and the importation of fashionable hats from Paris; an amiable old gentleman playing old Lutheran hymns on a musical-box made in Germany, a belated Quarterly Reviewer, plus Poetaster, posing in an English court dress as a lover of Liberty and a pioneer; and half a hundred other deities of the same sort, from a good-humoured medical practitioner and Chatterbox in Boston to a Byron in red shirt and breeches just discovered out West. I asked for bread, and they offered me Publisher’s or Nestlé’s food; I inquired about Walt Whitman, and they volubly assured me that Lowell and Holmes and Longfellow were still alive! Then faintly remembering that the literary classes in America had not used Whitman very kindly, I said as much to an authori-

tative city Scribe, who combined the avocations of banking and poetical criticism. 'O you are quite mistaken,' was his reply, 'we have never been unkind to Whitman. On the contrary, we all like the old fellow exceedingly, and are very sorry for him!'

"There it was—they liked him exceedingly, and were very sorry for him!—as the learned gentlemen in Greece were sorry for Socrates, as the more strenuous gentlemen in Palestine were sorry for one still Divine.

"I sent my New Year's greetings to Walt Whitman, with the assurance that at least half a dozen Englishmen joined with me in that message of affectionate homage; and shortly afterwards I visited him personally in his lonely lodgings in New Jersey, across the ferry from Philadelphia. He was old, worn, weary and weather-beaten but when the chord of fellowship was struck as gently dominant and simply wise as ever. The rooms where he dwelt were very poor, his diet appeared chiefly to consist of brackish tea and custard pie—many English labourers indeed have better shelter and more sumptuous fare. And his talk! Well, I have heard Scottish peasants and English mariners talk as simply, with something of the same grave faith in the Law of Life which flows to righteousness. His very vanity was beautiful and childlike. I had with me a lady who had been reared in the belief that Walt was a great and Christ-like man, and when she asked for his photograph he offered her not one but many, writing his autograph under each with boyish satisfaction and delight. Yet with all this he was sublimely free of the slightest literary self-consciousness, only it seemed to him the most natural thing in the world that we should be there with him, offering him the eager tribute of our

love. He had not one word of regret over his pitiable poverty, or of bitterness towards the literary classes which had insulted and neglected him ; he was perfectly satisfied with himself, with the world, with all Humanity. Though he loved such simple fame as came to him, though praise and sympathy made him happy, he did not live for these things—his thoughts were fixed higher, in the region of a perfectly peaceful and innocent Joy of Life.

“‘Pioneers, O Pioneers!’ As I sat and looked at Walt, with his own brave words ringing in my brain, I thought of that other great Personality (first of the three to be memorised in this article), who, unlike the American, had spent all his days in the full light and prosperity of earthly Fame. At a first glance no two writers could seem so different, so utterly unlike, as Walt Whitman and Charles Dickens ; yet the instant that I shook hands with Walt, and shared his custard pie, and saw how simple and sweet and childlike he was to the bottom of his big heart, I knew that Democracy, too, meant Fairyland, the one real Fairyland of Brotherhood and Love. It would need the pen of Dickens himself to describe the good grey Poet as he sat there, despised by all the Talents, but surrounded by all the Elves ! His own countrymen knew him not, but the spirits of Democracy had woven for him an immortal crown !

“What Dickens found in the dark streets of this City of London, Walt discovered everywhere in the many-coloured life of America, the spirit of natural Love and Sympathy filling every occupation with enchantment and turning Earth into Wonderland. Whitman expressed in colossal cypher the same rudimentary Joy of Life, the same elemental passions and affections, which Dickens expressed in delightful

Fairy Tales ; and in both one faith was supreme and dominant, faith in Man and in the divinity of Man's human destiny. Democracy to Walt was Fairyland, because it meant Joy and Love incarnate, emerging wherever human beings lived and breathed. Walt was a great Poet and Philosopher, Dickens was a great Poet and Romancist, but both were close akin in that elemental faith of which I have spoken, and both were simple, lovable, child-like men—Dickens in spite of his popularity and waistcoats, Walt in spite of that florid diffusiveness which caused him to be christened by an English criticaster as 'the Jack Bunsby of Parnassus!'

"It was not until some years later that I found myself face to face with the third of the great Personalities to whom my thoughts are turning at this close of the Year, and of whom, since he still lives, I must speak more guardedly, though not less reverently. At the first glance, again, he was utterly unlike the others, yet the instant that we met I realised that the Philosopher, as well as the Romancist and the Democrat, was a Wanderer from Fairyland ! For many a long day I had drunk knowledge and inspiration from his inspired pages, and once or twice we had corresponded, and now it fell about that we were near neighbours, I dwelling at Hampstead, he at Avenue Road, Regent's Park. Little did I fancy as I entered his doors for the first time that I should find the Elves of Dreamland even *there* ! He who had proclaimed the doom of all the gods, who had explored all the Heavens of Theology, and found every throne therein empty, was as veritable a dreamer, as gentle and child-like an optimist as either Dickens or Whitman. And moreover his Dream was *their* Dream—the perfectibility of human nature the

gradual growth of Love and Altruism among men, until the Earth in the good time coming should be a Fairy Place indeed !

“ As full as either of those others of the beautiful Joy of Life, as simple as Dickens, as brave and fearless as Whitman, Herbert Spencer sat there apart, ‘ holding no form of creed yet contemplating all.’ For year after year, in the face of constant physical illness, with the flame of life often flickering so low as to threaten to go out altogether, he had devoted himself to the perfection of that great Synthesis which has made his name memorable wherever human Science is known and understood. For so mighty an achievement, so splendid a devotion to pure thought, we must go as far back as Spinoza, but Spinoza was never so stretched upon the rack of pain, he had never to fight so wearily for very breath. But what was most wonderful in the personality of Mr. Spencer was the cheerfulness, the sweet reasonableness, the simplicity of his outlook on Life, and his buoyant delight in human activity and joy. There was indignation, of course, and deep resentment against things evil in our political and social systems, but no faltering, no bitterness, no despair !

“ The kernel of Herbert Spencer’s moral teaching is that Race is continually advancing through the gradual adaptation of human nature to the conditions of social life ; that, in other words, the egoistic impulses are decreasing in favour of the impulses which are altruistic. It is far outside the scope of the present paper to criticise a philosophy which is illustrated with such a perfection of illustrative detail, and illuminated with all the light of modern Science. One feature of it however, is of extraordinary interest at the present moment, when

the Century is drawing to a close, and that is the belief that as Humanity advances, Wars must decrease. Instead of the militant type characterising the struggle of Nations as well as of individuals for existence, the industrial type triumphs. Life becomes less painful and more beneficent, and the race grows nearer and nearer to a state of ultimate perfection. This is the belief of the profoundest thinker of the century, and without daring to assert whether it is true or false, justified or not justified by the teachings of History, I still think that it is in its very essence a beautiful Dream, like Dickens's Dream of human Fairyland, like Whitman's Dream of a triumphant Democracy. At the present juncture particularly, when a great wave of Militantism appears to be sweeping us back bodily into Barbarism, it is as difficult to believe in one Dream as in either of the others.

"New Year's Eve comes again, and in little more than a year the wonderful Century will be completed. What has it taught us? What has it brought to us, and what has it taken away? The delight in Fairyland has vanished with Dickens and the other Dreamers. Democracy has dwindled and become half-hearted with the passing away of Whitman and his fellow humanitarians. Herbert Spencer survives, holding aloft the torch of Science, and flashing its rays into the dark Future. When he too leaves us, who will seize the torch of the Optimist, and pass the inspiring message on?

"Reflect for a moment how the last Century ended, after the thrones of Empire had been shaken, and Humanity had hailed its Avatar, who melted away in his season like a man of Snow. The Dream of human perfection filled the air. Prophets in

England echoed the cry which Rousseau and the rest had raised in France, and which had passed from mouth to mouth as far away as the remotest East and West. Great Poets were singing the hopes of the human race; Byron and Shelley, Schiller and Goethe were full of the Golden Age to come. War was indeed decreasing, Industrialism, and Altruism were indeed triumphing. With the advance of the Century came the final apotheosis of natural Science, the discrediting of Superstition and Supernaturalism, and the realising of Goethe's great Vision, 'The Draining of the Marsh!' More practical good was done in a decade for poor Humanity by human Knowledge than had been done by Supernaturalism in hundreds of years. It seemed indeed that the Earth *was* to become a fairy place, the fit habitation of creatures who were slowly learning to love one another.

"But, alas! as the new Century grew older and older, men awoke to the fact that something had been lost, although so much had been achieved and gained. In its exultation at the discovery of new truths, Humanity had forgotten that deeper than all Science, more paramount than all progress, had been the belief in God—the God emerging—the God that has been, is, and is to be. That belief being practically dead, the voices of all the Prophets suddenly became silent, the music of great Poets was heard no more. True, here and there a voice was heard crying vainly for light and comfort. Poor Tennyson turned his eyes from the human God emerging, to bewail the God who was dead and buried, the militant and national God of a discredited supernaturalism. Carlyle, a broken-hearted, grey-hair'd child, cried aloud in his despair that 'God did nothing,' and so passed wearily away.

“And *now*?

“The Poets and the Fairy Tale-tellers are silent, Democracy and Humanitarianism are almost as discredited as Christianity, the Dream of perfection is over, and instead of the old Fairyland we have the endless babble of journalism and the triumph of the Banjo in the Street! Among all the great Prophets of the dying Century, only one remains to us—Herbert Spencer, on his sick-bed, still proclaiming Utopia, in the very face of a steadily increasing Darkness! Great indeed must be his faith if it has survived until this moment. So far, unfortunately, it has only been translated into the literature of imagination by the inspired pupil-teacher, who turned its moral axioms into the vocabulary of Miss Pinkerton’s Academy for Young Ladies; but George Eliot is already forgotten, or is remembered, if at all, only for her occasional somewhat flat-footed ventures into Fairyland.

“‘Pioneers, O pioneers!’ Whence will they come now, and what will they preach? The new Century is close upon us, and all the old Creeds (including the last despairing Dream of a transcendental Ethics, offered to poor men and women as a substitute for the Joy of Life) have been contemptuously rejected. Up to the present hour no one has suggested a reasonable substitute. Are we drifting carelessly back to Barbarism after all, and beginning all over again by cutting each other’s throats?’”¹

¹ “Latter Day Leaves.”

CHAPTER XXX

THE LAST SCENE OF ALL

ONCE the New Year had fairly begun, Mr. Buchanan, who had not lost faith in the Nauheim system, determined to recommence the baths. He took them with the utmost regularity, and with strict adherence to all the rules, but the result was disastrous. His pulse, instead of falling, rose, and was often intermittent and irregular. Added to this he was rapidly losing flesh. He became alarmed, had a serious talk with his doctor, and on learning from him that his disease was mortal and that there was absolutely no hope of cure, he hastily returned to London.

From the moment of his return to the great city his strength steadily declined. The doctors did all they could to reassure him, but his spirit seemed broken and his old hopefulness and cheerfulness gone. On March 16th he wrote to Dr. Stodart Walker: "Since I wrote to you I have been suffering infinite torments. I went to Hastings to try some Nauheim baths, and they did me more harm than good, and since then I have had a series of illnesses with much pain. I had to use *morphia* and it upset my nervous system terribly. Just now I am

trying vainly to conquer the nightly pain without resorting again to the infernal drug.

“My only prayer is that I may live for a year or two and complete certain work. I am miserable too, because if I go *now* my dear and only companion will be left penniless, at the mercy of the world. With a very little more time I can alter that. Imagine, my dear friend, how deep my sorrow has been during the last few months! Sometimes indeed I have felt as if my heart was broken. But after all why should I grieve?” “Dear Friend” (he wrote a few months later), “thanks for your kind letter. For the last two months I have been troubled with pain in the chest, chiefly at night, and lately I have dreaded the coming of the dark. Broadbent suggested morphia (injected) and while it brought relief the morphia made me miserably ill. I am now under the care of Doctor Morrison, trying to fight the pain without morphia, hitherto without avail. Morrison is confident of pulling me round. I will never, he says, be altogether ‘fit’ but the affection of the heart is slight and is not in fact the cause of my present pain and trouble. I hope he is right, and that I shall put in a few more years.”

The trying of a new system under a new doctor seemed to give him fresh hope. His health improved, and though the improvement was not great it was enough to relieve the state of terrible depression into which he had fallen. As the weather grew warmer he longed to get away from London, so we went to a small furnished house at Deal. “We are here by the briny” (he wrote to Dr. Gorham); “and I have had one or two runs on the cycle with quite pleasant results. The weather is delightful though a little cold, and I am looking forward to seeing you down.”

Though the air of Deal was very health giving and was certainly doing him much good, he was soon eager to be on the move again. "I expect to be in town for a few days after this week, so don't have a fit if you see my spectre at your door!" A few days later he wrote, "I don't think the new cycle cure for heart-disease wholly commendable! I have had several accidents—once being chucked at a dead wall in trying to avoid child-slaughter, and only two days ago being nearly run over! In the last affair I was *walking*, wheeling the bike, and I got into trouble in trying to save *Betsy*, and only escaped by turning a summersault under the carriage wheels! Seriously, apart from these accidents, I don't seem any the worse, but the weather is beastly, and does not give me a fair chance."¹

Our visit to London lasted a fortnight; at the end of that time we set out for France, our destination being Cap Gris-nez, where we were to occupy a small furnished house called Villa Gris-nez, the property of Monsieur Ducloy. At first it seemed that this move would be productive of much happiness. The villa was charming, and attached to it was a French cook called Rosalie, who was an artist in her way, and who produced dainties which would have tempted the most fastidious appetite in the world. Only a few yards from our door was the residence of Monsieur Ducloy's daughter, Madame Paul, whose house was filled with guests of all nationalities. We were constantly invited to join their social evenings or picnics on the shore, but Mr. Buchanan elected to live the life of a recluse, his sole recreation being short cycle rides which we took together, while in the evenings he would sit in the flower garden in

¹ Letter to Dr. Gorham.



ROBERT BUCHANAN AND "BETSY."
(Last Portrait.)

front of the villa and smoke his cigarette and chat with Monsieur Ducloy or play a game of chess with Monsieur Paul. He had brought with him boxes full of books and papers, but he could not settle his thoughts sufficiently to be able either to read or write. Our occupation of the villa lasted only four weeks, and during that time we had a visit from Dr. Gorham, who was so alarmed at the state of mind in which he found his patient that he urged him at once to take up his work again. The two had many long, earnest conversations on the subject, and on his return to London the doctor emphasised his advice by writing and urging it even more strongly. "Thanks for your letter" (wrote Mr. Buchanan). "I quite gather what you mean about uphill cycling, &c., but really if one cycles at all there must be ups and downs. Anyhow I purpose migrating at the end of my month, but I think it will be back to your side of the water. Since you left I've had horrible neuralgia, and neuralgic headaches, *damp* plays the devil with me and always did. To-day the weather is sunnier and brighter, thank God! I shall try my best to work, but alas! I never could do anything unless I felt the *afflatus*. I *don't* misunderstand your diagnosis; it was good advice to tell me to shake off my restlessness and work a little daily, and since you were here I've tried to follow it.

"Our month expires on Wednesday, August 22nd, and we shall certainly leave *then*—whither to go I am not yet quite certain. I don't think I should hasten back to perfidious Albion, if it were not that I am dying to see BETSY!! After all, she is the only thing, *pace* Miss Jay, that reconciles me to human life."¹

¹ Letter to Dr. Gorham.

On August 25th we left Cap Gris-nez, and on our arrival in London he wrote, "We stopped last night at Folkestone, and I hate, HATE, HATE everything English after the earwigs and Rosalie! I don't purpose remaining here many days, but I shall look you up and curse you for luring me from France." ¹

He was now exercised in his mind as to where we should spend the winter. To remain in London seemed impossible on account of the delicacy of his chest, so after some discussion we fixed upon Boscombe, where we arrived early in September. Here again disappointment faced him. "I don't think I shall ever care for Bournemouth" (he wrote); "it is too noisy and suburban, full of fly-blown lodging-houses and streets disinfected by the water-cart. No, it won't do—and I wonder what led people to recommend it." ¹

After much persuasion I induced him to remain and familiarise himself a little with his new surroundings, hoping by that means to induce him to settle down quietly for the winter months. Our stay in Boscombe lasted four or five weeks. We did a good deal of cycling, which he enjoyed hugely, and he returned to his work, writing chiefly at his poetry. He was at this time comparatively free from pain, and very gradually his restlessness and bitterness passed away. He began to enjoy his life again, and his heart grew more than usually tender to all living things. But although his mind became more composed and his health improved in many ways, he did not seem able to settle at Boscombe. "I think of coming to London" (he wrote on October 3rd), "and am writing for some rooms near the Langham. You will be glad, I know, to hear that during the last

¹ Letter to Dr. Gorham.

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few weeks I have been getting on famously with work. You were quite right, and I *had* to get back my writing power or lose it for ever. At first the place seemed lowering, and we had constant colds, but we are beginning to like it and shall possibly return later.”¹

The next and last communication from him which I am able to quote is a postcard, written to Dr. Gorham. It runs thus:—

“Our address for a few days after *to-morrow* (Monday, October 8th) will be 9, Duchess Street Portland Place W.

“We shall of course try to see you, but if you are passing westward, pray look in.—Always, R. B.”

We arrived at the rooms in Duchess Street on Monday, October 8, 1900, and all those friends who saw him at that time were amazed at the wonderful improvement in his health, for his old gaiety of spirit seemed to have come back to stay. His interest in his work was keener than it had been for years, and he was never tired of talking over future plans. Although we had taken rooms in the busiest part of London he continued his cycling as before, going about among the traffic with an intrepidity which filled me with terror. On Wednesday, October 17th, he went to the Avenue Theatre, saw and greatly enjoyed the performance of “A Messenger from Mars.” On the Thursday morning he interviewed several people on business, and got a little excited in conversation, and just before dinner, when we were again alone, he took up the evening paper, and after looking at it for a few minutes put it down again, saying he could not see very well. I thought he must have tired himself, and persuaded him to cease

¹ Letters to Dr. Gorham.

reading till after dinner. The symptom passed away and he thought no more of it.

The next morning, Friday, October 19th, his high spirits had not deserted him, for I heard him whistling merrily before he came in to breakfast. I asked him if the muddled vision had troubled him again, and he replied in the negative, assuring me that he felt particularly well in every way. Breakfast over and the morning papers read, we set off on our bicycles together.

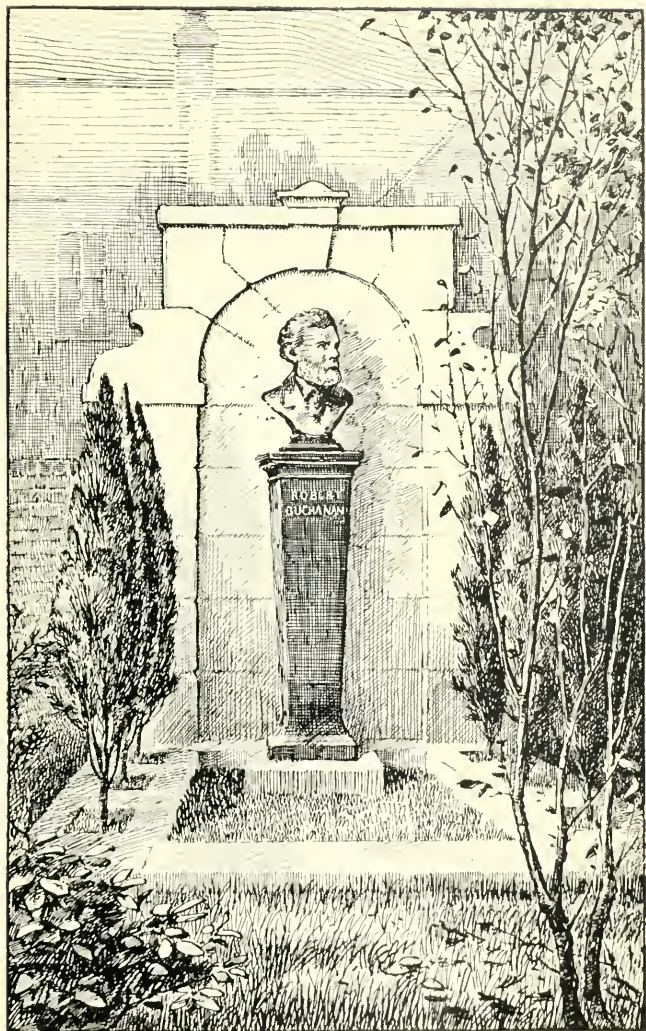
After a ride in Regent's Park, which lasted close upon two hours, we returned home. He partook of a hearty lunch, and then fell asleep in an easy chair beside the fire. He awoke refreshed, and after he had drunk a cup of tea and had written some half-dozen letters, proposed that we should cycle again. "I should like to have a good spin down Regent Street," he said. Those were the last words he ever spoke, for five minutes later the cruel stroke had descended upon him which rendered him helpless as a little child.

For eight months, passed in the endurance of much pain, his life was spared. On the morning of the 10th of June, 1901, he passed away in blessed unconsciousness, in the sixtieth year of his age.

AT THE GRAVESIDE.

By Henry Murray.

AS the train winds swiftly from the turmoil and clangour of Liverpool Street, through the bustling city and the squalid suburbs, making its way at last into the fresh open country, where the golden glint of the gorse and the ruddy splendour of the poppy



THE POET'S GRAVE.

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contrast with the tranquil verdure of the grass and the soft blue of the over-arching sky, the journey seems to present a confused allegory of the passage of a Soul from the troubled waters of existence to the calm of death. The temper of the day would almost seem in purposed keeping with the mood of the little band of friends who are escorting all that is mortal of Robert Buchanan to its last resting-place. Twice during the brief journey the fleeting clouds which chequer the blue of the air disperse themselves in a light rain, leaving the heavens fresh and fair again. We are precisely such a company as our friend would have desired to have about him at this moment; not a swarm of perfunctory mourners attracted by the splendour of a reputation, but a chosen few whose days have been brightened by his friendship. His sister-in-law and adopted daughter, the gentle lady whose affectionate care made bearable so many hours of pain; the good physician, most genial of Irishmen, whose kindly skill made smooth the rugged path he trod so patiently; the old servant who represents the faithful service of the antique world—these, and a handful of his closest friends, whose faces were often seen about his table, and, in these sad days about his bed, form the *cortège*.

Through the monotonous clank of the train which bears us down to Southend-on-Sea; through the hush which silences the babble of the passengers in the streets of the little town as the funeral procession slowly passes to the churchyard; mingling, not inappropriately nor unworthily with the sublime and pathetic cadences of the Burial Office and the yearning voice of the organ, with the murmur of prayer and the muttered responses at the grave-side,

and the soft rustle of the over-arching trees, the lines addressed by the dead poet to the mother who lies beneath the flower-strewn coffin are beating in my brain :—

“When the life-thread was spun
From the blood in her breast,
She look'd on her Son,
Smiled, and rocked him to rest. . . .

How swift the Hours run
From the East to the West !
Erect stood the son,
And the Mother was blest.

Yet lo ! all is done !
('Twas, O God, Thy behest !)
In his turn the gray son
Rocks the Mother to rest.

All is o'er, ere begun !
O my dearest and best,
Sleep in peace—till thy Son
Creepeth down to thy breast !”

The ever-rolling, silent hours have done their work, and Robert Buchanan stands on the other side of the great gulf impassable, side by side with the mother he worshipped and the wife he loved. Those simple and terrible lines, which were so often on his lips, as the problem they suggest dwelt so constantly in his mind—

“Le passé n'est pour nous qu'un triste souvenir,
Le présent est affreux, s'il n'est point d'avenir,
Si la nuit du tombeau détruit l'être qui pense”—

ring in my ears a sad antiphony to his tender and beautiful verses, almost as if I heard them again spoken by his voice. What is it that is here in the coffin at my feet—the husk and shell, the outworn

envelope, the discarded garment—or *all*? The generous hand whose pressure was so warm within my own is cold, the brilliant brain is darkened, the eyes which looked so frankly and bravely on the world are closed, the kindly lips have spoken their last word of hope and counsel. Is it indeed the end? For us, yes. For him? He thought not so. Only a few hours before the falling of the swift and cruel stroke which severed him, eight months ago, from the society of living men, he had said that "God and his own soul were the only entities of whose real existence he had living proof." To one who knows with what reluctance he said farewell to so many once passionately cherished beliefs, may it not be permitted at this last moment to wish, if not to hope, that the pleasant dream may be something more than merely a dream; that Robert Buchanan and his mother, his wife, and the long-lost friend of his youth, David Gray, have met again, and are awaiting in the peace of perfect understanding and of certain hope, the advent of those other friends they left behind on earth?

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE POETICAL
AND PROSE WRITINGS OF ROBERT
BUCHANAN.

"Poems and Love Lyrics." Published by Thomas Murray and
Son, of Glasgow ; Sutherland and Knox, of Edinburgh ;
Hall, Virtue and Co., of London.

1863.

"Undertones." (Poems.) Published by Edward Moxon
and Co.

1865.

"Idyls and Legends of Inverburn." (Poems.) Published
by Alexander Strahan.

1866.

"London Poems." Published by Alexander Strahan.

"Ballad Stories of the Affections." (Translated from the
Danish.) Published by George Routledge and Sons.

1867.

"North Coast and other Poems." Published by George
Routledge and Sons.

1868.

"David Gray and other Essays." Published by Sampson,
Low, Son and Marston.

1870.

"The Book of Orm." (Poem.) Published by Alexander
Strahan.

"Napoleon Fallen." (Lyrical Drama.) Published by
Alexander Strahan.

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1871.

"The Drama of Kings." (Dramatic Poem.) Published by Alexander Strahan.

"The Land of Lorne." (Sketches in the Hebrides.) Published by Chapman and Hall.

1872.

"The Fleshly School of Poetry." (Pamphlet.) Published by Alexander Strahan.

"St. Abe and his Seven Wives." (Poem.) Published anonymously by Alexander Strahan.

1873.

"White Rose and Red." (Poem.) Published anonymously by Alexander Strahan.

1874.

"Master Spirits." (Essays.) Published by Henry S. King and Co.

1876.

"The Shadow of the Sword." (Novel.) Published by Richard Bentley and Son.

1877.

"Balder the Beautiful." (Poem.) Published by W. Mullan.

1881.

"God and the Man." (Novel.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

"A Child of Nature." (Novel.) Published by Richard Bentley and Son.

1882.

"The Martyrdom of Madeline." (Novel.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

"Ballads of Life, Love, and Humour." Published by Chatto and Windus.

"Love Me for Ever." (Novel.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

"Annan Water." (Novel.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

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1884.

"Foxglove Manor." (Novel.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

"The New Abelard." (Novel.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

1885.

"The Earthquake." (Poem.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

"The Master of the Mine." (Novel.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

"Matt." (Novel.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

"Stormy Waters." (Novel.) Published by John Maxwell.

1886.

"That Winter Night." (Novel.) Published by Simpkin, Marshall, and Co.

1887.

"A Look Round Literature." (Essays.) Published by Ward and Downey.

"The Heir of Linne." (Novel.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

1888.

"The City of Dream." (Poem.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

1890.

"The Moment After." (Story.) Published by William Heinemann.

1891.

"The Outcast." (Poem.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

"The Coming Terror, and Other Essays." Published by William Heinemann.

1892.

"Come Live with Me and be My Love." (Novel.) Published by William Heinemann.

"The Buchanan Ballads." Published by John Haddon.

1893.

"The Wandering Jew." (Poem.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

"Woman and the Man." (Novel.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

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1894.

"Red and White Heather." (Tales and Ballads.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

1895.

"Lady Kilpatrick." (Novel.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

"The Charlatan." (Novel written in collaboration with Henry Murray.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

1896.

"The Devil's Case." (Poem.) Published by the Author.

"Diana's Hunting." (Story.) Published by Fisher Unwin.

"Marriage by Capture." (Story.) Published by Fisher Unwin.

"Effie Hetherington." (Novel.) Published by Fisher Unwin.

1897.

"The Ballad of Mary the Mother." Published by the Author.

1898.

"Father Anthony." (Novel.) Published by John Long.

"The Rev. Anabel Lee." (Novel.) Published by Pearson and Co.

1900.

"The New Rome." (Poems.) Published by Walter Scott, of Edinburgh.

"Andromeda." (Novel.) Published by Chatto and Windus.

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